AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES AND TRUST

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Preparing students for the future is not exclusively the responsibility of educators (Epstein, 1994). Research from studies conducted by Olmstead and Rubin (1983) and Henderson and Berla (1994) agree that when parents engage in the educational process, student attitudes and academic achievement improve. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) assert that when parents and teachers assume a shared commitment and are equally attuned to the meanings and roles of parent involvement, the results are invaluable.

Previous examinations of African American groups (Brooks-Gunn, Klenbanov, & Duncan, 1996; McLyod, 1990, 1998; Steele, 1992) have centered on demographics as determinants of student academic success or failure. For example, it has been found that African American students living in poverty-stricken areas are at a higher risk of performing poorly on cognitive tests, experiencing substandard performances in school, and having higher drop out rates than their European counterparts (Brooks-Gunn, Klenbanov, & Duncan, 1996; McLyod, 1990, 1998; Steele, 1992). However, when parents are involved either at home or in the community (e.g., school, church, recreation centers), African American children have a tendency to experience more academic success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Clark, 1990).

Problem Statement

Having reviewed the literature regarding parent involvement and the way that involvement varies according to racial and ethnic backgrounds, the level of discrepancy between prior research and their results is evident. The first clear inconsistency surrounds the effect of involvement on student outcomes. There is limited research available on the effects of parental involvement for middle school youth, in particular, and it is unclear which aspects of parental involvement would be most effective in promoting school learning during those years (Trivette & Anderson, 1995). The second inconsistency lies in the shortage of investigations into group variations of parent involvement by race, culture, and social status. The third limitation concerns the methods that have been employed, since studies are often restricted by sample sizes thereby hindering plausible generalizations (e.g., Jeynes, 2005; Rodgríguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999; Schneider & Lee, 1990).

Previous studies support the assertion that parent involvement can positively influence children's educational motivation and subsequent achievement (Casanova, 1996; DeCarvalho, 2001; Henderson, 1987; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). However, Epstein and Lee (1995) found that during their child's middle school years, many parents report infrequent communication between themselves and the school, which often promots feelings of isolation and/or disconnect. Frequently, this disconnection leaves families uninformed about student progress, school events, and parent involvement opportunities.

In addition, research implies that race exhibits a negative effect on African American parent involvement by undermining the group's ability to comply with school

participation expectations. More specifically, the argument is that because of the history of racial discrimination, African American parents may approach schools with more criticisms than support (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In addition, a variety of barriers may hinder levels of parent involvement, particularly for lower income families, to include: educational level and self-efficacy, perceptions of "welcomeness", as well as structural employment and social barriers (Smith, 2001). Many times, minority parents want to become involved in the schooling process but are uncertain how (McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003).

Theoretical Rationale and Need for the Study

The rationale and design of this study is rooted in the theories of trust and welcomeness. Although parents may have many motives for school engagement, there may be just as many reasons they fail to connect (Molland, 2004). When schools fail to respond to racial and cultural differences or fall short of treating families equally, it is likely that minority families may not participate in institutional programming (Lawson, 2003). It is reasonable to expect, then, that parent perceptions of schools may influence involvement decision-making (Smith, 2001) and, as a result, parent involvement appears to be more frequent in schools where welcoming climates exists (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Prior research (Baier, 1994; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) has found that parental trust may be swayed by school attributes, impacting their judgments about the school's ability and reliability to educate students (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Studies show that parents, who have developed confidence in the school, tend to be more engaged in campus-based activities (Barnes, Mitchell, Forsyth, and Adams, 2005). As a

result, researchers consider trust critical to academic success (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Young, 1998). Therefore, future analyses should consider ethnic and cultural differences to better understand their influences (if any) on home-school trust development and parent involvement practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the educational involvement practices of African American parents of 7th and 8th grade students, in two public school systems in a Midwestern metropolitan area. Specifically, the study's objectives were to understand (1) how African American parents and guardians are involved in their child's schooling, (2) if parents felt a sense of welcomeness in the school, and (3) if parents trusted their children's school. Attention was given to relationships among the concepts of parent involvement, school welcomeness and school trust.

Research Questions:

1. What are African American parents' involvement practices in their 7th and 8th grade children's education?
2. What are African American parents' perceptions of their child/children's school's "welcomeness" level?
3. Do African American parents consider their children's schools trustworthy?
4. What is the relationship between "welcomeness", school trust, and African American parent involvement practices?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used throughout:

An *alternative education* school is a school that "provides students with unique situations and open avenues for continuing their education while addressing their unique needs. Students who have truancy problems, behavior problems, children of their own, counseling needs, or other special needs may find alternative education the best environment for learning" (Oklahoma City Public Schools, 2008; p. 243).

Middle School is defined as school usually including grades five through eight or six through eight (Merriam-Webster, 2003).

Parent involvement is defined as direct contact between school staff and parents (McKay et. al, 2003); parent participation in school activities or programs; parent initiated activities in the home that supports learning; parent-student communications about academic expectations; and parent-student communications about school related issues (Trivette & Anderson, 1995).

A p*articipant* is defined as a parent and/or guardian who chose to take part in the study and provided written consent to the researcher to examine his/her responses.

School welcomeness is defined as a state of agreeableness and/or kind reception in a school; in particular, a parent's impression of the school. The construct is multidimensional in that it considers perceptual responses based on parental/familial interaction with the school – specifically with teachers/staff members, as well as the general building/campus environment (Mitchell, 2006).

A *charter* school is defined as a "public school established by contract with sponsors. They are… exempt from many laws and regulations. Charter school contracts can be approved for no longer than five years at a time, and must include criteria by which effectiveness of the school will be measured. They often promote a specific curriculum

and learning style and are operated by parents, teachers and other interested community members" (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2009)

An *enterprise* school is defined as a school that is "incorporated as a membership-supported…not-for-profit corporation. Parents make up the majority of the corporate members who elect a board of directors. The board of directors determines policies such as academic requirements, admission standards, student ethics, uniform policies, and curriculum. The principal, teachers, students, and parents then carry out policies" (Oklahoma City Public Schools, 2008; p. 244).

A *specialty* school is a school [with] a "curriculum that focuses on a specific area or areas in addition to the comprehensive curriculum of regular schools. Students must make application for admittance. Admission criteria include a review of academic standards, attendance, and discipline" (Oklahoma City Public Schools, 2008; p. 247).

A *traditional* school is defined as a school that"transmit[s] to a next generation those skills, facts, and standards of moral and social conduct that adults deem to be necessary for the next generation's material and social success." [It is] "described as being 'imposed from above and from outside'…the students are expected to docilely and obediently receive and believe these fixed answers. Teachers are the instruments by which this knowledge is communicated and these standards of behavior are enforced." (Dewey, 1938; pp. 1-5).

Trust is defined as "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; p. 192).

Significance of the Study

The impact of culture, perception, and trust on parental involvement has relevance across all areas of instruction. If parents conceptualize their ability to contribute to their child's educational experience differently, this will have practical implications on the quality of each student's education based on the type and amount of involvement each parent is capable of providing. Additionally, if educational institutions become more aware of how they can encourage parent involvement, efforts towards educational reform may be improved.

Organization of the Study

Chapter Two presents the literature review, an overview of parental involvement theory and research, as well as the concept of trust as it pertains to the educational setting. A brief statement on the development and construct validation of the researcher-developed *School Welcomenss Scale* is provided, in addition to information on the remaining instruments used in this study – the *Parent Involvement on All Types of Activities Subscale* and the *Parent Trust of School Scale*.

The methodology used in the study is described in Chapter Three. The chapter presents the introduction, research questions, research design with a description of the study and its variables; population and sampling descriptions; procedures, instrumentation, validity and data collection; as well as, data analysis and a summary. Chapter Four presents the results of the study and data analyses. Finally, Chapter Five includes the summary, conclusions, and recommendations resulting from the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Researchers have solidified the link between parent involvement and educational success and, as a result, parent involvement has become a primary piece of the national goals for educational reform (National Education Goals Panel, 1994). Previous studies revealed that increases in parental involvement can advance students' academic performance (Caplan, Hall, Lubin, & Fleming, 1997; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Peressini, 1998) and, as a result, the significance of familial support has been stressed in discussions concerning the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and middle-class children. Previous research also indicated that both African American and low-income parents consider educational attainment a means to economic and social security, but their actual involvement frequently leaves much to be desired in terms of school expectations (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Ramirez, 2003).

In this chapter, a review of the literature acknowledges that parent involvement changes with regard to student age. Therefore, the following segments outline the benefits of parent involvement and document the impact ethnic/cultural diversity, parent perceptions, and trust have on involvement practices. Information identifying the different forms of parent involvement, practice variations within the African-American community, and barriers to involvement are then presented. Finally, an introduction to

the theory of trust, specifically the relationship between parent involvement and trust, is provided.

Parent Involvement

Hickman (1999) noted that of all educational issues, parent involvement has been the most difficult to characterize as it could mean different things to different people. As a result, many researchers have concentrated their efforts into specifically categorizing the many different activities, as opposed to solidifying one catchall definition. Despite disparities about what activities actually constitute parent involvement, generally, the concept refers to a parent's direct participation and investment of resources in their child's schooling, with the expectation of positively influencing academic outcomes and psychosocial development (Epstein, 1995; Grolnick & Slowiazcek, 1994; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Reynolds, 1992). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) support this description and recommend parent involvement as an effective method of enhancing positive educational outcomes for students.

There are numerous ways for parents to engage in their children's learning process (Epstein 1990 and 1995; Feuerstein, 2000; Henderson, Marburger & Ooms, 1986); Scribner, Young, & Pedrova, 1999). Involvement can take place in three settings: in the home (e.g., providing for basic needs and safety), the school (e.g., volunteerism or membership in parent-teacher organizations), or in the community (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). While research indicates that parent involvement in the home has the most impact on academic achievement, studies show that school participation can offer positive results as well (Ho & Willms, 1996; Muller, 1993). School involvement—volunteerism, participating in fundraising activities, membership in the local school board, membership

in parent-teacher organizations (Epstein, 1990 and 1995) – makes parents' efforts more visible, thereby communicating a belief that they are concerned about their child's educational success and further encourages collaboration between the home and school (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).

Although many parents exhibit a great deal of participation at the primary grade level, their involvement is likely to decline as a student progresses through middle and high school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). This "early years" involvement may take many forms, including establishing and communicating high expectations to children (Morrow & Wilson, 1961), volunteering at the school and communicating with teachers and administrators (Drake, 2000), serving on various education-centered committees (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004), and involvement in the home, to include discussing school activities and offering other elective opportunities for educational enhancement (Morrow & Wilson, 1961; Fan 2001).

In some instances, schools outline participation for families (Lawson, 2003). These "schoolcentric" activities may range from those allowing parents limited power and influence (e.g., involvement in the home); to minimal participation (e.g., clerical, extracurricular, cultural, and child development activities at schools); to more common contributions (e.g., service as teachers' classroom assistants, inclusion in parent-teacher associations); or more powerful roles that treat parents as partners (e.g., school improvement, evaluation, and reform committees). Questions about how these impositions affect parent involvement persist (Lawson, 2003). Nevertheless, traditional categorizations of parental involvement (e.g., attendance at school events, workshops, PTA meetings, and academic conferences) have been criticized as not adequately

representing the involvement of parents of color. Their low participation rates have often led educators to conclude that these parents are uninterested in their children's academic performance (McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003).

Benefits of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement has surfaced as an important issue among policy makers and researchers, however there is no clear guidance about what it truly means to be involved or about what forms of involvement are most effective (Trivette & Anderson, 1995). Though divergence persists over the effectiveness of parent involvement efforts (Casanova, 1996; De Carvalho, 2001; Henry, 1996), research indicates that parent involvement often boosts students' success in the classroom (Manitoba Dept. of Education and Training, 1994; Qian & Blair, 1999; Yan & Lin, 2005), encourages homework completion, improves language skills, discourages absences (Jeynes, 2005), suppresses drop out rates (Manitoba Dept. of Education and Training, 1994), improves attendance, behavior, and educational quality (Drake, 2000). Further, it was determined that the positive effect of parent involvement holds regardless of parent education level or racial heritage, as it has been found to be one of the most effective means of improving the achievement of minority and disadvantaged children (Jeynes, 2003). Parent involvement may even discourage familial reservations about the school by promoting their inclusion in various educational reform activities (Peresinni, 1998).

Perceptions and Expectations

Schools and parents, both, have expectations of each other. The community expects schools to accommodate and understand their families (Muscott, 2002), and sometimes feel as though the expectations schools have of them are unrealistic (e.g., assisting with

homework, participating in school functions, etc.) which, in turn, may encourage feelings of discomfort (Remirez, 2003). Schools expect families to become involved, many times anticipating that they will initiate their own engagement, subsequently categorizing them as "good" parents. If they are not involved, parents may be labeled as irresponsible, uninterested, or "bad" in general (Epstein, 2001).

Previous studies have found that involvement may be mediated by parental role construction; parents' confidence in their ability to support learning; and, parents' sensitivity to teacher/staff invitations (Chevalier, 2003; Lawson, 2003). Perceptions about involvement expectations may also have some bearing on parent practices. For example, Lawson (2003) discovered that teachers and parents possess dissimilar ideas about involvement—and, the most obvious disparities stemmed from parent conduct. In the study, involved parents were essentially found at school while uninvolved parents visited only when problems or other critical issues concerning their children arose. While school staff believed that parents should support the school's efforts towards achieving academic success, many also thought that parents overlooked those responsibilities. In addition, teachers' negative perceptions contributed to the labeling and stigmatizing of parent practices, which further distanced parents from the school.

Although Diamond and Gomez (2004) established that social class and race could often intertwine to influence African American involvement, previous educational experiences moderated by demographic features, along with school environment – to include racial climates and unfair disciplinary practices (Thompson, 2003a) — seem to also play a significant role in determining types and levels of participation practices. In addition, parent cliques, attitudes of school staff, cultural influences, and family issues,

may also influence minority involvement (Lareau, 2003). As a result, it must be recognized that these issues – either independently or in tandem – may often discourage African American parents' engagement in the educational process, even when they desire to be involved.

School perceptions and parents expectations may affect participation—especially in low-income and minority localities—where school staff members may view parents as part of the challenges with education as opposed to useful resources (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Fields-Smith, 2005). As a result, the inefficiency of communication can further encourage climates of exclusion and mistrust, as well as discomfort about perceived and actual cultural distinctions (Rosado & Ligions, 1999).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Prior research investigated why some parents elect to engage in their children's education and fail to do so (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Some have concluded that ethnicity is an essential family background factor contributing to parents' decisions about how and when they choose to be involved. Still, results remain inconclusive (Floyd, 1998). Previous studies have documented African-American parents' beliefs in the importance educational involvement, as well as their interest in assuming a range of parent-involvement roles (e.g., program supporter, home tutor, and audience). While it seems African American parents want to be actively involved in their child's educational process, they are also inclined to believe that it is the school's responsibility to initiate efforts and opportunities to involve them. This reasoning, alone, may explain why African American parents, in relation to other racial groups, participate less in school-based activities (Chavkin &

Williams, 1993). Although opportunities for involvement may abound, parents cannot engage in these functions if they are impractical or made to out of reach.

Barriers to African American parents may also include a struggle with language; segregation within, rather than between, schools; socio-cultural incongruence between home and school; teachers' low expectations for their children (Fields-Smith, 2005); a history of negative encounters with schools; overwhelming family survival concerns; inflexible employment situations; health issues; limited transportation and childcare; and, feelings of powerlessness to appropriately negotiate the educational system for their child (An Urban Schools Initiative Report to Ohio's Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1997; Gamse, 1994; Garlington, 1991; U. S. Department of Education, 1996). Research has also identified differences in the involvement activities of parents that often correlate with race, ethnicity (Ho & Willms, 1996; Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993), and parent education level (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Kohl et al, 2000; Shumow & Miller, 2001).In addition, opportunities for involvement are not the same across all schools—activities and schedules vary, thereby preventing some parents' inclusion (Carey, Lewis, & Farris, 1998). It is quite possible that any single factor or combination of these factors could, in some measure, clarify why at least some of the differences in parent involvement practices exist.

Previous research identified a relationship between socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity and parental involvement practices within schools, and has supported the idea that higher SES parents are clearer about expectations for their children and are more involved with the educational process since they have access to more resources than their lower SES counterparts (Griffith, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Epstein & Dauber

(1991) point out that limited economic and academic resources may not be the only reasons why parents are less involved than higher SES parents. In some instances, low academic expectations from parents, low involvement expectations from the schools, and limited opportunities for involvement may all impact low SES parents' involvement practices (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Although the notion of apathy might be invitingly applied where lesser-involved parents are concerned, many times they fail to participate because of a lack of invitation from the school (Bracey, 1996).

Welcomeness

While there are many reasons for parents and families to visit schools, there are probably just as many reasons why they choose not to. Parents or families may feel unable to negotiate the system; they may be less educated and may feel intimidated by the school environment; or, they may feel socially out of place (Molland, 2004). These negatives often outweigh the widely publicized benefits of educational involvement and support weakened home-school connections with African American parents and schools (Davis, Brown, Bantz, & Manno, 2002; Thompson, 2003b), thereby encouraging their alienation from the educational system (Trotman, 2001).

Isolated parents often experience a real disconnect schools, and may also encounter feelings centering on discomfort, discrimination, and develop sensitivity to separation even when they do make efforts to interact (Bempechat, 1992). This seclusion may promote fear, depression, school phobia in some parents (Epstein, 1995), and even fuel suspicions about the school (Epstein, 1996).

Previous studies have explored the impact of educator behavior on the weakened home-school connections within the African American community. Results indicate that

educators often discount parenting styles that differ from their own, which often demoralizes parents' power (Lareau, 1987; Thompson, 2003a). This disregard may be a direct outgrowth of the teacher's lack of experience in working with varying cultures and ethic groups (Thompson, 2003b). The divide formed only advances parents' feelings of isolation (Calabrese, 1989; Scott-Jones, 1987).

To consider the inviting nature of a school, questions surrounding the students' (educational) interest; staff reliability, professionalism, competence and honesty; as well as home-school communication, are all issues of which families share a common interest. According to Tomlinson (1994), welcoming practices may include any or all of the following: initiating frequent communication (regarding student progress, current lesson plans, etc.); engaging in two-way communication (using newsletters, parent conference times, telephone calls); providing opportunities for parents and families to come to the school (e.g., Open House, student showcases, parent workshops); offering to accommodate parents (e.g., meeting parents away from school, conducting home visits, etc.); discovering and overcoming barriers to involvement (e.g., language, childcare, transportation); establishing a parent and/or family resource center that can provide a wealth of information to parents and families (e.g., parent workshops, booklets and brochures, opportunities to meet/share ideas/experiences with other parents); creating a Parent Involvement Coordinator position; providing training to parents; providing training to teachers on how to deal with parents; supporting staff efforts to involve parents; and, developing of a sense of community. The perception that parents hold of schools and their professional staff may determine whether or not they choose to become involved (Smith, 2001). Research has found parent involvement higher at schools that

create an inviting climate—housing a welcoming school staff (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). It stands to reason, then, that parents will support educational programming in which they consider welcoming, effective, and essentially, trustworthy.

Trust

Claibourn and Martin (2000) along with Coleman (1988) consider the idea of trust an outgrowth of Marx's theory of social capital. Specifically, "…social relationships often reduce the time and energy necessary to gather information. Rather than scour many information sources to keep abreast of events, individuals pick up information incidentally as a result of social interactions…social networks help create networks of reciprocity" (Claibourn & Martin, 2000, p. 268). Claibourn and Martin (2000) and Putnam (1995, p. 665) further solidify the connection between social capital and trust: "The theory of social capital presumes that, generally speaking, the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them and vice versa" (p. 971). Even so, while trust is a necessary element of social relations, it always involves an inescapable element of risk and doubt (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

A lack of consensus exists over a suitable conceptualization of trust (Barber, 1983) — should trust be perceived as a psychological event within the individual or an intersubjective or systemic social reality (Lewis & Weigert, 1985)? While much of the divergence stems from a previously adopted conceptualization (Mishra, 1996), most recently, researchers have begun to promote a more multidimensional notion of trust (Butler, 1991; Swan, Trowick, Rink, & Roberts, 1988). Mishra (1996) defined trust as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is (a) competent, (b) open, (c) concerned, and (d) reliable" (p. 265). A more

recent assessment of the literature encouraged Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) to identify honesty as a fifth dimension of trust. For the purposes of this study, trust will be regarded as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189). Specifically, the five dimensions are (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999):

1. Benevolence refers to an individual's confidence that the trusted person will act to protect the trustor's well being.
2. Reliability is the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed to accomplish a particular task or objective.
3. Competence refers to the perception of the trusted party as having the skill level required to complete tasks or obligations.
4. Honesty refers to the perception of the other as accepting responsibility for actions and avoiding distortion of the truth in order to shift blame to others.
5. Openness is the perception of the other as willing to provide rather than withhold information, even when that means risking one's own vulnerability by divulging personal information about himself or herself.

The Significance of Trust

To function both properly and effectively, organizations must be characterized by some measure of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Albeit fundamental for a trusting climate to exist for faculty members in a school (Hoy, Tarter, & Witkoskie, 1992), trust also encourages collaboration among faculty members, parents, and students, which in turn, supports efforts for positive school reform (Kratzer, 1997) and general

improvements in student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Also, trust is a key ingredient in the establishment of home-school relations (Adams & Christenson, 2000) especially since faculty trust in parents has been found to facilitate parent-teacher collaborations (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

In an examination of the trust-achievement hypothesis, Hoy (2002) considered an ability to trust others a basic characteristic of learning since it is usually a cooperative practice, and the very notion of distrust hinders cooperative process. Unfortunately, the reluctance to trust a school many times results in a loss of the support, which acts as the core of the learning community. This result can have harsh consequences, such as deterioration in academic performance and a growth in behavioral disturbances. Many times, it is not until the school begins to suffer devastating effects on the quality of learning, that staff members realize the extent to which education depends on trust (Baier, 1994).

Research states that when schools harvest high levels of trust, they are more likely to effectively execute and maintain academic restructuring efforts (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Bryk and Schneider, 2002). In addition, schools exhibiting elevated trust levels between both teachers and families as well as teachers and principals are commonly described as having more "stable populations; minimal racial and ethnic tensions among students, parents, and staff; and educators are able to provide parents with clear evidence that students are learning" (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; p. 97). Consequently, trust and a welcoming environment work hand-in-hand.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) report that "schools succeeding in familial engagement often share three key practices: building trusting, collaborative relationships among

teachers, families, and community members; recognizing, respecting, and addressing families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences; and, embracing a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared" (p.7). Miretzky (2004) notes that preservation of diversity and difference is a crucial part of establishing cohesion among school stakeholders and should be founded on an acceptance of differences, commitment to the common good, and recognition that the school and its environment are dependent upon one another.

Trust Inhibitors

If families and schools want to collaborate effectively, they must do so on the basis of "mutual trust, confidence, and respect" (Brewster & Railsback, 2003, p.5). Henderson and Mapp (2002) go on to identify various barriers to school and familial trust-building: bad first impressions; poor communication; parents' past experiences; parents' lack of self-confidence; teachers' lack of confidence; history of discrimination; differing expectations of parent-teacher roles; and, lack of confidence in the school. Accordingly, lessening the isolation felt by African American parents and increasing their connections with academic professionals must be a focal point within the education transformation process (Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001).

Luhmann (1979) identifies familiarity is a precondition for the establishment of trust as well as distrust. Circumstances that diminish opportunities for face-to-face exchanges encourage anonymity and could effect trust development, especially since people begin to find themselves interacting with others who are unfamiliar or unknown to them at all. Where personal connections are absent, a significant manifestation of trust should not be expected (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

Accordingly several issues, including socioeconomic status, affect trust in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001); specifically, the lower the socioeconomic status of a community, the lower the level of that community's trust of the school. In addition, Bryk and Schneider (2003) discovered that school sizes and levels may also affect trust development. Smaller elementary schools with student populations of 350 or fewer may be viewed more trustworthy than larger ones. Researchers believed that this trust preference could be grounded in simplicity—it may be more practical for smaller schools to offer families the personal attention and opportunities for inclusion than larger institutions. Finally, migrating student populations make it difficult for teachers, parents, and students to establish or maintain the groundwork necessary to establish trusting relationships.

Trustworthiness

Not only is it imperative to identify the benefits and inhibitors of trust but also the building blocks, or encouragers. As alluded to in previous studies (Baier, 1994; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), parental trust may be persuaded by school attributes. Lewis and Weigert (1985) pondered the derivation of trust, questioning whether or not it was a consequence of individual perception or the result of an interaction between an individual and reality.

First impressions often serve as the basis for reputation development and may be employed by parents to make judgments about school trustworthiness (Monsted, 1994). Many times, credibility and trustworthiness are utilized interchangeably when measuring an organization's capability of securing its guarantees to the public, or believability (Blomqvist, 1997). In the case of educational institutions, schools may be judged on their

reliability to educate students (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993), in terms of sincerity, predictability, and competence (Blomqvist, 1997).

According to Baier (1994), parents' trust in schools is often based on their perceptions of faculty members' intentions and behaviors, which ultimately transforms into shared ideas about campus credibility. Essentially, parents entrust the school with their children. The assumption of trust in this arrangement is impacted by the parents' satisfaction with academic services, as well as the length of time in which they have been associated with the school. As a result, school trust is then anticipated based on consistency in decision-making, safety, and care. Barnes, Mitchell, Forsyth, and Adams (2005) posit that parents, who have confidence in the school and encourage children's learning efforts, tend to be more engaged in school activities. In addition, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) along with Young (1998) consider trust vital to educational success. In a nutshell, whenever trust was coupled with parental involvement, academic achievement was predictable (Techannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Fan, 2001), thereby establishing a plausible relationship between the two concepts.

Summary

While definitions of parent involvement vary and opinions differ with regard to which practices are most influential, research supports assertions that involvement positively impacts student academic achievement. Discussions concerning how this variability is mediated by familial factors, such as ethnic diversity, socio-economic status, educational background, and parental perception persist. In addition, inconsistencies with involvement practices may result from parent access to resources as well as how well they trust in their child's school.

Studies suggest that when trust is paired with parent involvement, academic success can be expected (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Fan, 2001). In addition, previous research has identified the link between school climate and parent involvement frequency (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Molland, 2004). Consequently, this study aimed to discover ways in which schools may further extend themselves to their ever-diversifying student population – particularly African Americans – to improve home-school relations while supporting efforts to increase academic achievement. What remains unknown are the ways in which parent perceptions of welcomeness and trust inform – and are related to – parent involvement for African American parents/guardians.

Restatement of the Research Questions

Ultimately, the study aspired to discover the aforementioned conceptual relationships through the answering the following research questions:

1. What are African American parents' involvement practices in their 7th and 8th grade children's education?
2. How do African American parents' perceive the school's level of "welcomeness"?
3. Do African American parents consider their children's schools trustworthy?
4. What is the relationship between "welcomeness", school trust, and parent involvement practices?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study examined factors associated with African American parent involvement with children in middle school. Topics presented in this chapter include a description of the participants that guided the study, sampling procedures, the instruments and their psychometric properties, an outline of the procedures, and the data analytic strategies.

Participants

African American parents/guardians of 7th and 8th grade students enrolled in two public school systems – Public School System #1 and Public School System #2 – in a Midwestern metropolitan city comprised the population from which the study sample was drawn.

Description of School Sites: Public School System #1

Roughly 40,000 students were enrolled in Public School System #1 – 36, 463 attended traditional schools while 4,442 attended charter schools. Of the 40,905 students enrolled during 2007-2008, 22,322 students were enrolled in grades Pre K – 5; 6,582 were enrolled in grades 6-8; and 7,559 were enrolled in grades 9 – 12. Specifically, there were 2,191 7th grade students and 2,173 8th grade students. Additionally, approximately 30.4 % were Black; 39.1 % were Hispanic; 22.5 % were White; 2.7 % were Asian; and, 5.3 % were American Indian.

In 2007-2008, 47,169 parents attended Open House programs district wide; however, only 146 parents attended College Night. During the 2007-2008 school year, 4,920 parents held memberships in Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) across grades Pre K – 12, and 25,642 parents and guardians attended parent-teacher conferences in that same timeframe. Trends over the 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 school years depict a decline in parent participation in Open House (-12%), PTA Membership (-22%), and College Night (-35%). Parent Teacher Conferences attendance experienced an increase of 26%. Equally apparent was an increase in minority student enrollment, particularly with Hispanics at an increase of 8.7%.

Twenty-three agencies within the Public School System #1 were responsible for educating 7th and 8th graders: five alternative education schools, five charter schools, three specialty schools and nine traditional schools. To more accurately determine initial trends in the data, the researcher divided the school district into four quadrants: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Seventh and eighth grade students were educated by a combination of traditional, enterprise, charter, specialty, and alternative education schools across the metropolitan area.

Preliminary figures showed that the majority of the schools serving 7th and 8th grade students were in the northern half of the city. Specifically, nine campuses were located in the northeast quadrant of the city, while eight were in the northwest. Only six schools were found in the southern-most areas of the city—five in the southwest quadrant and one in the southeast (see Table 3.1).

Estimates determined that the northwest quadrant educated 12% more students than the northeast quadrant; 40% more than the southwest quadrant; and 87% more than the

southeast quadrant. Seven of the nine schools located on the northeast side served a significantly larger African American student population than any other minority group. Of those seven schools, most of them had a minute PTA participation (in relation to their student populations), no active PTA organization on campus, or did not provide membership data at all. These northeast quadrant schools were also the campuses where limited success was found on the statewide tests, with roughly 40% of 7th and 8th grade students meeting grade level goals in reading and math (see Table 3.2).

District-wide, the schools identified as alternative were performing most poorly, with less than an estimated 30% of students scoring "satisfactory" or above on the state's criterion-referenced tests. Traditional schools had the next lowest scores with roughly 50% – 60% of their students meeting those same goals. All of the specialty and enterprise schools performed well on the test, with approximately 80% - 100% of their student population meeting grade level criteria. Three of the five alternative programs were located in the northeast quadrant, which was densely inhabited, mainly, by African-Americans. Three of the five charter schools were located in the northwest quadrant of the city and serviced a larger Hispanic and Caucasian population (see Table 3.1). Additional estimates and trends associated with student total populations, enrollment classification, ethnicity categorization, income (as established by Free/Reduced Lunch participants), parental involvement, and student achievement were documented as well (see Table 3.2; Figure 3.1).

Table 3.1

Middle Grades Campus Demographics
(2007-2008)

Name of School	Quadrant	Pop.	Grades	Ethnicity (%)					Gender (%)	
				W	B	H	A	AI	M	F
Traditional Middle School #1	NE	757	7-12	1	96	1	1	1	52.8	47.2
Traditional Middle School #2	SW	480	6-8	14	8	71	0	7	45.4	54.6
Traditional Middle School #3	SW	873	6-8	25	12	55	1	7	51.7	48.3
Traditional Middle School #4	NW	732	6-12	19	66	7	2	6	53.8	46.2
Traditional Middle School #5	NE	608	6-12	11	73	11	1	4	51.2	48.8
Traditional Middle School #6	NE	385	6-8	13	78	5	0	4	52.5	47.5
Traditional Middle School #7	SW	816	6-8	14	9	70	0	7	50.2	49.8
Traditional Middle School #8	NW	750	6-8	22	28	37	5	8	51.1	48.9
Traditional Middle School #9	SE	580	6-8	26	32	33	1	8	52.2	47.8

Table 3.2

Campus Characteristics
(2007-2008)

Name of School	Transfer (%)	Free/Reduced Lunch (%)	Parent Participation (Actual #)			% Scoring "Satisfactory" (CRT - Math)		% Scoring Satisfactory" (CRT - Reading)	
			OH	PTCD	PTA	7th Grade	8th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
Traditional Middle School #1	4.0	96.0	228	158	17	44	41	43	39
Traditional Middle School #2	4.4	99.8	961	244	0	52	71	54	50
Traditional Middle School #3	4.3	96.3	1151	402	60	52	70	57	60
Traditional Middle School #4	8.2	79.9	651	331	118	51	46	64	56
Traditional Middle School #5	5.1	96.4	35	141	0	45	30	54	37
Traditional Middle School #6	0.3	97.3	115	70	43	61	47	56	69
Traditional Middle School #7	1.3	100.0	598	976	0	52	55	50	39
Traditional Middle School #8	2.3	95.2	846	321	27	60	77	67	73
Traditional Middle School #9	5.2	98.8	449	307	0	61	59	66	65

** Parent Participation: OH = Open House; PTCD = Parent Conference Day; PTA = Parent Teacher Association
** N/A = Not Available

Figure 3.1

District by Quadrant
(2007-2008)

NW	N	NE
Charter Middle School #1 Enterprise Middle School #1 Specialty School #1 Charter Middle School #2 Alternative School #3 Charter Middle School #3 Traditional Middle School #4 Traditional Middle School #8 N = 8; Quadrant Pop ≈ 4365	Alternative School #1 Alternative School #2 Traditional School #1 Alternative School #4 Charter School #4 Specialty School #2 Specialty School #3 Traditional Middle School #5 Traditional Middle School #6 N = 9; Quadrant Pop ≈ 3852	
W		E
Traditional Middle School #1 Traditional Middle School #3 Alternative School #5 Traditional Middle School #7 South Charter Middle School #5 N = 4; Quadrant Pop ≈ 2610	Traditional Middle School #9 N = 1; Quadrant Pop ≈ 580	
SW	S	SE

Description of Sites: Public School System #2

Public School System #2 is an independent, Pre K-12 district with an enrollment of approximately 1032 students. Two schools, an arts academy, a ninth grade academy, a pre-school program and two community learning centers are maintained within the district. The district is located within the boundaries of city property and spans 10.5 square miles.

According to the Public School System #2's statistical profile (Oklahoma Department of Education, 2009), roughly 1048 students were enrolled in the school system. Of the 1048 students enrolled during 2007-2008, (3^{rd} = 64; 4^{th} = 64; 5^{th} = 72; 6^{th} = 83; 7^{th} = 66; 8^{th} = 63) 559 students were enrolled in grades Pre K – 5; 212 were enrolled in grades 6-8; and 277 were enrolled in grades 9 – 12 (Education Oversight Board, 2009; Oklahoma Department of Education, 2009). Of the 2007-2008 total student enrollments, approximately 98% were Black; 1% were White; 1% were Hispanic; 0% were Asian; and, 0% were American Indian (Education Oversight Board, 2009; Oklahoma Department of Education, 2009).

Public School System #2 is composed of two sites that are both responsible for educating 7^{th} and 8^{th} grade students. While both traditional and specialty schools were available to middle school students, data showed that the majority of 7^{th} and 8^{th} grade students were enrolled at Independent School #1. (Entry to the district's specialty school had strict academic and behavioral admission requirements that often limited student eligibility.)

Results for the state's criterion reference test results were not disaggregated between the two sites educating middle school students (the schools are both coded the same at the state level and are subsequently considered one entity), therefore, information about competitive performance was unavailable. Overall, an 41% of 7th graders and 61% of 8th grade students scored "satisfactory" or above on the state's math criterion-referenced tests, while 66% of 7th graders and 68% of 8th graders scored equally as well on the reading portion of the exam. In 2007-2008, 54% parents attended Parent-Teacher Conference district wide (Education Oversight Board, 2009). Information about the district's Open House attendance and PTA membership was unavailable.

Sampling Procedures

A sample of African-American parents of 7th and 8th grade students enrolled in several traditional schools within both school districts participated in the study via household mailings. In an effort to encourage representation from all four quadrants of the larger school district, only traditional education programs serving 7th and 8th graders were invited to contribute. Alternative, charter, enterprise, and specialty were not invited to participate in an effort to avoid a sampling bias and gain a more accurate picture of involvement practices across the area. Of those selected for the study, principals of the following campuses agreed to participate: Traditional School #1, Traditional Middle School #2, Traditional Middle School #4, Traditional Middle School #5, Traditional Middle School #6, Traditional Middle School #8, and Traditional Middle School #9.

The range for eligible families from participating schools was between 22 and 216, totaling an estimated 983 potential households across the larger school district. The

smaller, independent school district was later added because of its large African American population and due to slow response rates from Public School System #1 (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3: School Site Participation Rates

School Name	# Eligible Families	# of Respondents	Response %
Traditional School #1	215	96	45%
Traditional Middle School #2	22	6	27%
Traditional Middle School #4	51	53	104%*
Independent Middle School #1	106	48	45%
Traditional Middle School #5	216	58	27%
Traditional Middle School #6	205	80	39%
Traditional Middle School #8	141	22	16%
Traditional Middle School #9	133	19	14%
Totals	1089	382	35%

**More responses were collected from Traditional Middle School #4 than were initially expected, based on student enrollment. This could be the result of migrating families.

The total population of African American families of 7th and 8th graders at each school was offered an opportunity to complete the survey in an effort to promote response variability. With the help of administrators, participants' names and addresses were obtained from each campus' database.

Dillman (2000) found that survey procedures were more likely to have higher response rates if: (1) respondents trusted the researcher and believe that the rewards for survey completion compensate for the costs; (2) features of the survey situation were considered; (3) the questionnaires were respondent-friendly; (4) the researcher thoroughly communicated the importance and usefulness of each person's response; and (5) multiple contacts were used. While encouragement from members of the local Parent

Teacher Associations was preferred, it was difficult to contact those organizations for assistance. And, in most schools, principals wanted their teachers (and themselves) to have limited or no involvement in the survey collection process. In addition, most contact between the researcher and school administrators occurred via telephone or email. Two attempts via mass mailings (Dillman, 1991; Dillman, 1978) as well as pre-notice and follow up-procedures (Fox, Crask, & Kim, 1998) were used to encourage unresponsive families (Dillman, 2000).

Nine-hundred and eighty three packets were mailed out to qualifying participants in Public School System #1. The initial contact with the participants resulted in a about a 13% response rate (n = 123). Eight percent (n = 78) of the packets were returned to the researcher via US Mail either due to incorrect contact information. Efforts to involve the black community through efforts from a local church (e.g., announcements, church contacts) resulted in a 4% (n = 42) increase, and through the use of reminder letters another 9% (n = 81) of completed packets were collected.

Due to the slow response rate from the Public School System #1, Public School System #2 was later added as an effort to reach additional members of the target group living in the metro area. One hundred and six packets were mailed to the parents of 7th and 8th grader students at Independent School #1 and forty-eight were returned, resulting in a 45% response rate on that campus. In the end, the Oklahoma Parent Information Research Center was contacted and its workers asked to assist with encouraging parents to complete the survey. Through the efforts of that organization, eighty-eight more

packets were collected, resulting in a total of three-hundred and eighty two surveys for use in data analysis.

Research Design

To collect data for this study, a survey was used. Information was generated through the assessment of parents/guardians of 7th and 8th grade students in attendance at eight schools across a large metropolitan area. The survey sent participants included both demographic and scale-rating instruments. Data garnered from those sources were examined for demographic relationships amongst parent involvement, school welcomeness and school trust factors.

In general, two approaches were used to direct this study: descriptive and statistical. Under the guidance of each research question, descriptive analyses were conducted to better understand the population sample and identify initial data differences and similarities. Once a complete understanding of the sample was attained, factor analyses was conducted for the all three scales – the *Parent Involvement in All Activities* Scale, the *School Welcomeness Scale*, as well as the *Parent Trust of Schools Scale* – to identify underlying factors for each concept.

Next, the four research questions were addressed. An ANOVA was conducted to identify significant differences in total scores for parent involvement, school welcomeness, and school trust. Differences with regard to student grade level, parent educational background, and parent visitation practices were of particular interest. Significant differences were further examined by post hoc testing. Finally, regression analyses were conducted to determine if African American, middle school parents'

perceptions of "welcomeness" and trust were related to one another or if could be related to their educational involvement practices.

Instrumentation

To answer the questions formulated for this study, surveys were employed. The goal of the surveys was to gather information related to factors associated with perception (welcomness and trust) as well as parent involvement practices within the educational system.

Psychometric Analysis & Validation

Content validity of a test relies on accurately defining the domain the test is intended to assess, then making some judgment as to the sufficiency with which that domain has been assessed. The items that comprise the test must be a representative sample of the domain (Shultz and Whitney, 2005). An initial exploratory factor analysis was used to examine the factor structure of each instrument, thereby determining if the resulting factor structure mirrored that of the instrument's creator. Coefficient alpha was calculated as a measure of internal consistency, to determine whether or not the items across the instrument were measuring the same underlying construct.

To address parent involvement, Epstein's (1994) *School and Family Partnership Surveys of Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades* was utilized, which was derived from items on the *School and Family Partnerships: Questionnaires for Teacher and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades* (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). The 6-page parent survey included twelve questions with over 80 items surveying these issues concerning family practices of involvement in their child's education, school

practices to inform and involve families, information desired by families about children, classes, schools, and community services, homework patterns, family background and experiences, and open-ended comments, noting that: "Users may use the information to select only those scales that are important for their research or program development with schools" (Epstein & Salinas, 1993; pg. 3). For the purposes of this study, responses addressing family practices of involvement were of interest—in particular, the *Parents' Involvement on All Types of Activities* scale**.** The activities assessed in the instrument include: parenting, volunteerism, and learning activities in the home. The battery of surveys on the *School and Family Partnership Surveys of Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades* report reliability estimates for the teacher and parent scales, ranging from a modest (α = .44) to very high (α = .91).

Parents' Involvement on All Types of Activities. The scale is comprised of 18 items and reports an α = .77. Sample items include, "Talk to my child about school" and "Help my child with homework." All items are coded from a low of 1 ("strongly disagree") to a high of 8 ("strongly agree"). The sample on which the scales were normed included 2115 parents in fifteen elementary and middle schools in Baltimore, Maryland. The schools sampled were in economically depressed areas in the inner city.

School Welcomeness Scale. The *School Welcomeness Scale* may be utilized to individually estimate or determine the welcomeness of a school, or to work in combination with other data collection methods in a comprehensive assessment of school climate (Mitchell, 2006). The eight-point Likert scale allows respondents to rate their agreeableness with each of the 20 survey items using anchors ranging from "strongly

agree" to "strongly disagree" (Shultz and Whitney, 2005; p. 56), reported an alpha = .980. The scale was normed on 102 parents of an elementary and middle school in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, as part of the scheduled Parent Teacher Conference Day exercises. One hundred percent of the participants were African American, and were the parents or guardians of students ranging from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade (Mitchell, 2006; see Appendix).

The *Parent Trust of School Scale* (Forsyth, Adams & Barnes, 2002) was employed to measure school trust. The instrument consisted of ten items arranged on a Likert scale. Sample items included "This school keeps me well informed," "Kids at this school are well cared for," "This school is always honest with me," and "I never worry about my child when he/she is there." Scale development included statistics collected from ten schools; the items utilized on the form exhibited factor loadings above 0.68. A coefficient of 0.95 suggested the instrument has strong internal consistency.

Procedures

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University and both public school districts, the researcher contacted administrators at each of the participating sites – either in person or via telephone – to discuss the study. In addition, requests were made to meet with faculty members in an effort to garner project support; however, principals requested limited involvement from their teachers/staff. Therefore, the researcher attempted to contact local PTA officials to meet with, orient, and discuss the significance of the study with members of the organization. Unfortunately, PTA contact information was unavailable for many of the schools or it

was difficult to contact organization personnel. Nonetheless, surveys were mailed to the parents of 7th and 8th grade students who were enrolled in traditional schools serving middle school students in both school districts.

Packets mailed to the parents included a cover letter guaranteeing confidentiality, as well as a list of demographic questions concerning household data. The study's rationale was included in the survey and two copies of the informed consent – one for their records and one for the researcher. Parents were asked to complete the survey and return it along with the signed consent form to the researcher by a specific date using a self addressed stamped envelope. The researcher was made available to answer questions and read all survey items when literacy presented a challenge.

Limitations

The findings of the current study, while informative, are also limited. A selection bias must be considered in light of the resulting sample respondents. Of those invited to participate, one-third completed and returned the survey packets. Ironically enough and categorically speaking, completion of the survey packet, itself, would have been considered an overt type of involvement; therefore, those who did not return the packets may have been continuing in their normal practices. Still, it would have been interesting to know the perceptions of those non-responsive families and understand how their input might influence the current study's findings. In addition, sixth grade students, while considered middle school age in some arenas, were not included in this research because of the structure of some schools (e.g., including 6th grade in the elementary school

format); as a result, the resulting range of applicability can be limited to only the African American parents of 7th and 8th grade students, in a Midwestern metropolitan city.

Summary

The third chapter described the methods used in this study. Specifically, this chapter described the participants studied, instrumentation employed, data collection and analysis procedures followed, as well as an examination of study limitations. After the collection and recording of data, the study's research questions were answered. The results of the analysis are presented in chapter four. The summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study are reported in chapter five.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the educational involvement practices of African American parents of 7th and 8th grade students' across two school districts in a Midwestern metropolitan area. Specifically, the study's objectives were to learn (1) how African American parents/guardians practice involvement in their children's schooling, (2) if parents felt welcome in their children's school, and (3) if parents trusted their children's school. While parent visitation practices were not addressed in the literature review, an examination of that data were presented in the findings to gain a clearer understanding of African Americans' presence on school campuses. Attention was also given to relationships between parent involvement practices; their perceptions of school welcomeness; as well as their school trust ratings.

The remainder of this chapter presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study, the psychometric analysis of the study instruments, and the answers to each of the research questions.

Characteristics of Respondents

Surveys were collected from 382 participants who had children attending one of eight schools: Traditional School #1, Traditional Middle School #6, Traditional Middle School #5, Traditional Middle School #4, Independent Middle School #1, Traditional Middle

School #8, Traditional Middle School #9, and Traditional Middle School #2. Specifically, 316 (83%) of participants identified themselves as a "parent"; 45 (12%) as a "grandparent"; 8 (2%) as an "uncle/aunt/cousin"; 8 (2%) as "other"; 4 (1%) as a "sister/brother"; and 1 (.3%) as "unrelated". Far more females 326 (86%) were involved in the study than males 56 (14%); however the distribution of participants with regard to student grade relationship was similar—199 (52%) aligned themselves with a 7th grader and 183 (48%) responded in relation to an 8th grader.

When educational level was taken into consideration, of the 382 responding across student grade levels, 279 (73%) indicated that they had received some education beyond a high school diploma, up to the master's degree while the remaining 103 (27%) indicated they had a high school diploma or less. Participants were also asked to identify the frequency with which they visited their child's school. College educated parents (e.g., master degreed, bachelor degreed) reported that they visited school campuses more than lesser educated parents (e.g., trade, diploma, no diploma). Via self report, lesser educated parents, primarily, indicated that they visited their child's school less than once a month or on special occasions (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Sample Characteristics

	Master Degree %*	Bachelor Degree %	Associate Degree %	Some College %	Trade %	Diploma %	No Diploma %
Educational Attainment	5	15	14	39	7	14	7
Visitation Practices							
Daily, 3-5 times/week, 1-2 times/week	52	56	33	41	33	34	23
Monthly	21	26	33	27	22	17	19
Special Occasions/Less than once a month	22	18	34	29	44	42	42
Never	5	0	0	3	0	8	15
I feel welcome at this school							
Yes	95	93	85	91	74	91	93
No	5	7	15	9	26	9	7
I trust this school							
Yes	84	88	81	87	63	91	89
No	16	12	19	13	37	9	11

*n = 382

Table 4.1: Sample Characteristics (continued)

	"Daily" Visitors %	"3-5 Times a Week" Visitors %	"1-2 Times a Week" Visitors %	"Monthly" Visitors %	"Less than Once a Month" Visitors %	"Special Occasion" Visitors %	"Never" Visitors %
I feel welcome at this school							
Yes	100	90	95	91	83	81	92
No	0	10	5	9	17	19	8
I trust this school							
Yes	97	88	88	87	77	78	85
No	3	12	12	13	23	22	15

*n = 382

Psychometric Properties

Reliability estimates were calculated for the *Parent Involvement on All Types of Activities Scale* (Epstein & Salinas, 1993), the *School Welcomeness Scale* (Mitchell, 2006), and the *Parent Trust of School Scale* (Forsyth, Adams, & Barnes, 2002). Factor analysis conducted for all three instruments using SPSS (SPSS 17.0 for Windows 2003). Factor analysis was used to identify the structural dimensions of the instrument and to examine the items relationships with one another. The results from these analyses are as follows:

Parent Involvement in All Types of Activities Scale

Parent Involvement on All Types of Activities Scale registered a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability, $\alpha = .91$. Cronbach's alpha assesses how well a set of items (or variables) measure a single, one-dimensional latent construct –in this case, "parent involvement". In addition, a review of the item total correlation values revealed a range from .29 to .71, offering evidence of a relationship among the items. In this study, KMO = .907 and Bartlett's $p = .000$, suggesting that a high degree of correlation exists and a factor analysis was appropriate.

While both principal axis factor and principal components analyses are used to uncover latent variables in the factor analysis process, principal axis factoring (common factor analysis) works well to identify the common variance of variables while excluding unique variance, and principal components analyses mirror both common and unique variance. Therefore, a principal components analysis was performed to here to identify both unique and common variance amongst the components of the *Parent Involvement in*

All Types of Activities Scale (Garson, 2009). With regard to the Kaiser (1960) rule, it was noted that the factor solution in this study identified four factors with an eigenvalue greater than one. Altogether, the four components explained 64% of the variance within the scale. Specifically, Component One accounted for 41% of the variance; Component Two, 10%; Component Three, 7%; and Component Four, 6%. Correlations amongst the components were modest; however, the goal of the procedure was to identify both the common and unique contribution of each factor (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Component Correlations for the Parent Involvement Scale

Component	1	2	3	4
1	1.000	.365	.320	-.230
2	.365	1.000	.152	-.210
3	.320	.152	1.000	-.104
4	-.230	-.210	-.104	1.000

In reference to Stevens' (2002) recommendation of selecting a solution that accounts for approximately 70% of the variance, the current four-factor solution accounts for 64% of the total variance. Pertaining to Cattell's (1966) scree plot (Figure 4.1), four components are visible—one large component is obvious while the remaining, three smaller components are noticeable but less apparent.

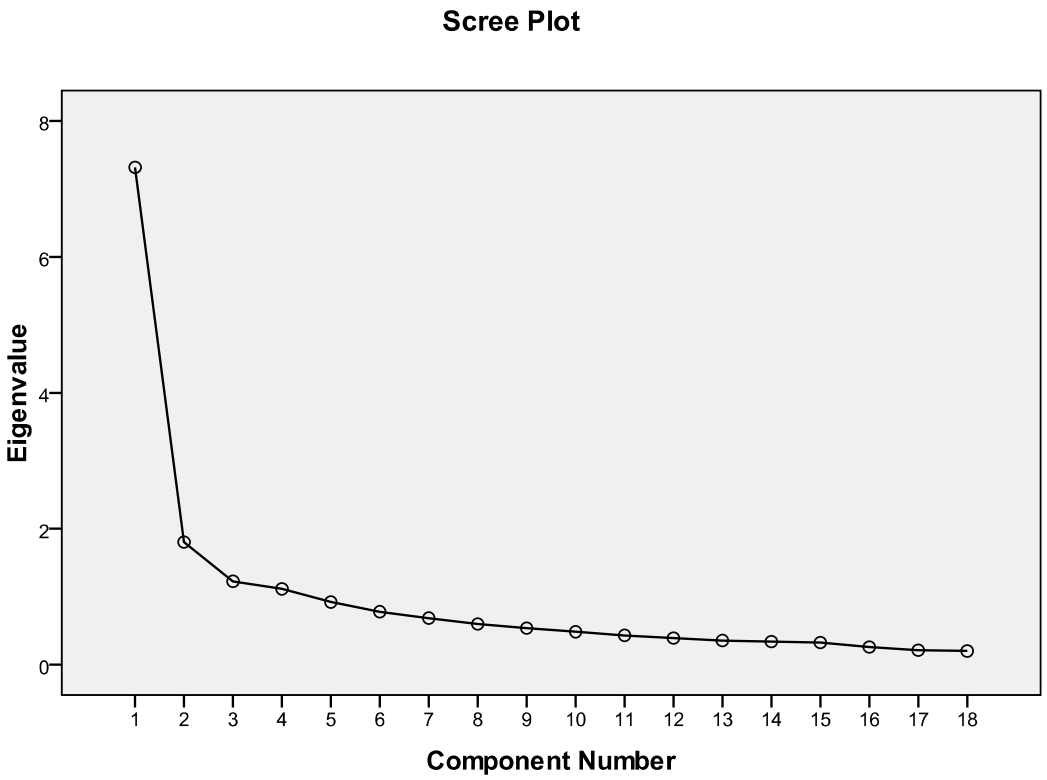

Figure 4.1. The scree plot illustrates the relative magnitude of the eigenvalues for each of the 18 parent involvement components on the *Parent Involvement on All Types of Activities Scale*.

Table 4.3: Component Matrix of Retained Factors of *Parent Involvement in All Types of Activities*

	Component				h^2
	1	2	3	4	
Talk to my child about school.	.354	-.168	.647	.026	.573
Visit my child's classroom.	.682	.279	.214	-.333	.701
Read to my child.	.753	-.122	-.156	-.284	.687
Listen to my child read.	.766	-.236	-.192	-.119	.693
Listen to a story my child wrote.	.721	-.245	-.243	-.009	.638
Help my child with homework.	.790	-.307	-.001	-.009	.718
Practice spelling or other skills before a test.	.781	-.332	-.128	-.080	.743
Talk with my child about a TV show.	.695	-.243	-.139	.068	.566
Help my child plan time or homework/chores.	.758	-.163	.106	.082	.620
Talk with my child's teacher at school.	.697	.347	.138	-.298	.714
Talk with my child's teacher on the phone.	.492	.323	.113	-.481	.590
Go to PTA/PTO meetings.	.353	.580	-.182	.151	.516
Check to see that my child has done his/her homework.	.757	-.197	.042	.145	.635
Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom.	.475	.654	-.069	.050	.660
Go to a special event at school.	.458	.452	.095	.250	.486
Take my child to a library.	.550	.127	-.249	.454	.586
Take my child to special places/events in the community.	.688	.148	-.070	.394	.655
Tell my child how important school is.	.354	-.091	.669	.318	.682

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 4 components extracted.

Each value in the component matrix represents the simple correlations of the variables with the components. Stevens (2002) recommends using an absolute value of .40 as a critical value for factor analysis with a sample size of 180. Here, the majority of the items on component one well exceed that value. However, only three items meeting that same criteria load on factor three; two on factor three; and two on factor four –both a positive and negative. Thus, it appears that the *Parent Involvement on All Types of*

Activities Scale is a four-dimensional instrument (see Table 4.3). In this study, item responses organized themselves in such a way that the concept of parent involvement might be viewed in the following manner: off-campus activities (component one); campus-based activities (component two); communication of educational standards/expectations (component three); and utilization of community resources (component four). Items loading on the "off-campus activities" component included: "Read to my child", "Listen to my child read", "Help my child with homework", and "Help my child plan time or homework chores." Items loading on the "campus-based activities" included: "Volunteer in my child's classroom" and "Go to PTA/PTO meetings". The two items loading on the "communication of educational standards/expectations" component included: "Talk to my child about school" and "Tell my child how important school is." Finally, the two items loading on the "utilization of community resources" were "Take my child to the library" and "Talk to my child's teacher on the phone" (which loaded negatively).

The School Welcomeness Scale

For the *School Welcomeness Scale*, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability was .97. A review of the corrected item total correlation values indicated a range from .59 to .83, suggesting a large average inter-item correlation. In this study, KMO = .97 and Bartlett's p = .000.

A principal axis factor analysis was performed. While the scree plot (see Figure 4.2), presents an argument by displaying more than one factor, only one factor is clearly visible; the second factor is relatively small. The large, general factor accounts for

63.56% (see Table 4.2) of the total variance. An assessment of item loadings will be discussed in the next section.

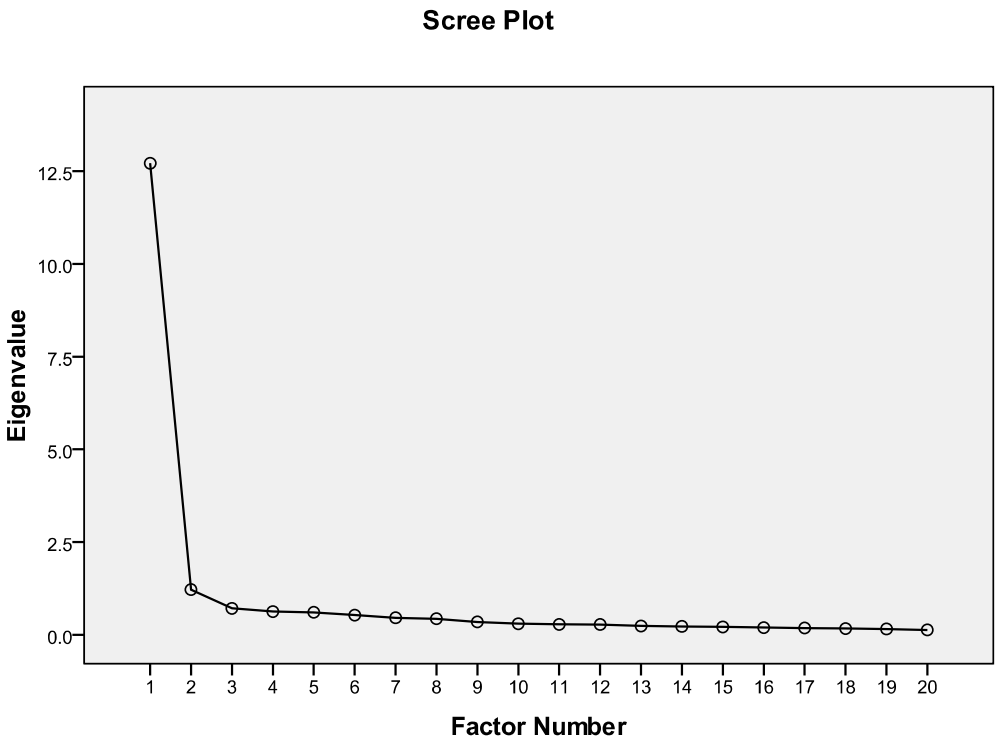

Figure 4.2. The scree plot illustrates the relative magnitude of the eigenvalues for each of the twenty *School Welcomeness Scale* factors.

Table 4.4: Principal Axis Analysis of *School Welcomeness Scale*

Factor	Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.712	63.562	63.562
2	1.217	6.087	69.649
3	.714	3.569	73.218
4	.627	3.135	76.353
5	.604	3.020	79.373
6	.531	2.653	82.026
7	.457	2.283	84.310
8	.433	2.167	86.477
9	.347	1.735	88.211
10	.300	1.499	89.710
11	.281	1.407	91.117
12	.275	1.373	92.490
13	.237	1.183	93.673
14	.223	1.116	94.789
15	.213	1.066	95.855
16	.193	.967	96.822
17	.183	.914	97.736
18	.168	.842	98.578
19	.155	.773	99.351
20	.130	.649	100.000

Each value in the factor matrix represents the simple correlations of the variables with the factors (structure coefficients). An assessment of the combination of items that load on each factor suggests the relationship between the twenty items. Items loading on each factor exceed the critical value of .40 rule (Stevens, 2002); consequently the *School Welcomeness Scale* was used as a unidimensional measure (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Factor Matrix of Retained Factor of *School Welcomeness Scale*

Items	Factor 1
The building is clean and well organized.	.659
It is clear what the school's goals are for my child's education.	.838
The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	.833
When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	.767
Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	.837
When I leave a message for a teacher/staff, my call is returned.	.828
The staff and students interact respectfully.	.806
I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	.766
Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely.	.820
This school provides a safe environment for everyone.	.833
The teachers treat all students equally.	.795
School administration treats all students fairly.	.816
I know the names of my child's administrators.	.642
I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	.874
I know the names of my child's teachers.	.694
The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	.766
School staff members are easily accessible.	.892
I am informed of important meetings/special school events.	.843
Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	.740
I visit the school when I am asked to come.	.591

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring

The Parent Trust of School Scale

Overall, the scale exhibited very high internal consistency ($\alpha = .98$). In addition, the corrected item total correlations ranged from .78 to .94, suggesting very high relationships among the items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were employed to determine sample

appropriateness for factor analysis. In this study, the KMO = .96 and Bartlette's sphericity held a probability value of .000 suggesting suitable item correlations for the analysis.

A principal components analysis was performed. With regard to the Kaiser (1960) rule, it was noted that the factor solution in this study identified only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Principal Components Analysis of *Parent Trust of School Scale*

Component	Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.175	81.751	81.751
2	.398	3.983	85.733
3	.283	2.832	88.566
4	.254	2.538	91.104
5	.233	2.332	93.436
6	.182	1.818	95.253
7	.175	1.751	97.004
8	.119	1.190	98.194
9	.101	1.011	99.205
10	.080	.795	100.000

In reference to Stevens' (2002) recommendation of selecting a solution that accounts for approximately 70% of the variance, the current one-factor solution in this study accounts for 82% of the total variance. And, pertaining to Cattell's scree plot (Figure 4.3), it is clear that only one component is present (see Table 4.7).

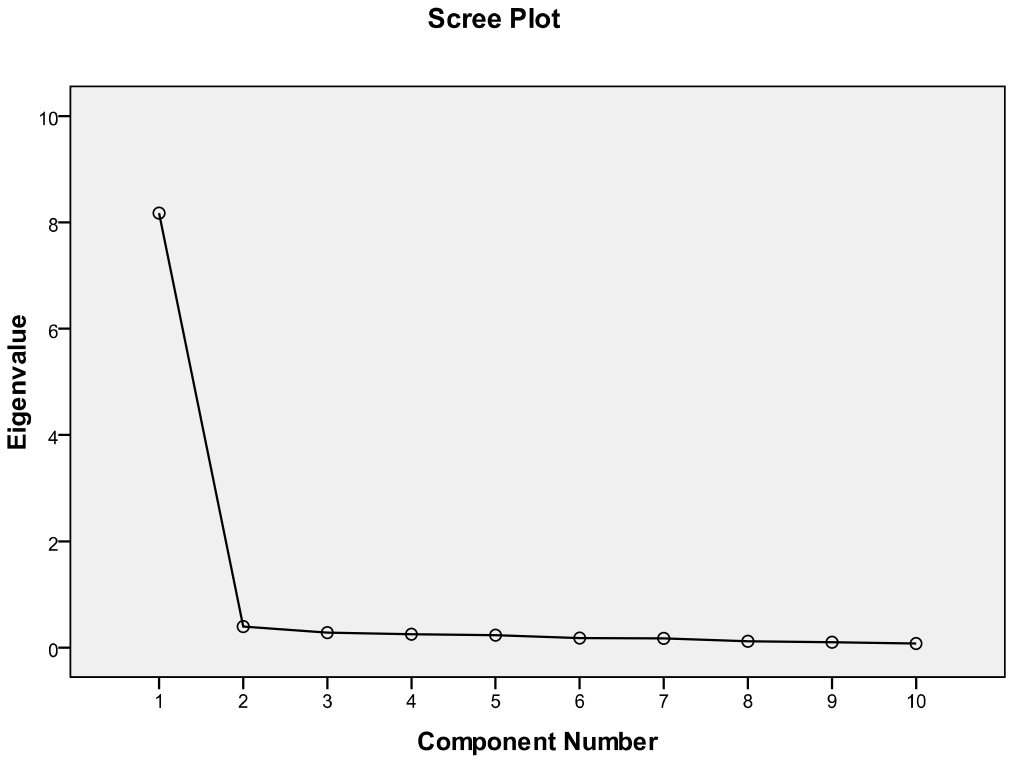

Figure 4.3. The scree plot illustrates the relative magnitude of the eigenvalues for each of the 10 *Parent Trust of School Scale* components.

Each value in the component matrix represents the simple correlations of the variables with the components. Stevens (2002) recommends using an absolute value of .40 as a critical value for factor analysis with a sample size of 180. Here, each of the items well exceeds that value. Thus, it appears that the *Parent Trust of School Scale* is a unidimensional construct including all 10 item scores into a total scale score.

Table 4.7: Component Matrix of Retained Factor for *Parent Trust of School Scale*

	Component 1
This school always does what it is supposed to.	.887
This school keeps me well informed.	.879
I really trust this school.	.931
Kids at this school are well cared for.	.920
This school is always honest with me.	.898
This school does a terrific job.	.954
This school has high standards for all kids.	.902
This school is always ready to help.	.940
I never worry about my child when he/she is at school.	.812
At this school, I know I'll be listened to.	.909
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

These analyses provide evidence that the instruments are appropriate for answering the three questions that guided this investigation. The research questions follow.

Research Questions:

1. What are African American parents' involvement practices in their 7th and 8th grade children's education?
2. What are African American parents' perceptions of their children's school's "welcomeness" level?
3. Do African American parents consider their children's schools trustworthy?
4. What is the relationship between "welcomeness", school trust, and African American parent involvement practices?

Research Question 1: What are African American parents' involvement practices in their 7th and 8th grade children's education?

To address Research Question 1 and determine how African American parents/guardians were involved in their child's school, a total score was calculated for each participant who completed the *Parent Involvement in All Types of Activities Scale*. A descriptive analysis of the data was compiled after which the data was then disaggregated by student grade, parent educational level, and parent visitation practices in an effort to identify similarities and differences. Finally, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to assist in difference interpretation.

An initial review of the parent involvement data revealed many similarities among the participants. Descriptively, when students' grade levels were examined as a mediator for parent involvement practices, no differences were readily apparent; parents/guardians of 7th graders and 8th graders engaged in involvement activities at similar rates (see Table 4.8). The activities in which parents indicated they were most involved were"talk to my child about school" and "tell my child how important school is". The activities in which parents were least involved were "[going] to PTA/PTO meetings" and "[volunteering] in my child's classroom". An ANOVA was conducted to confirm initial findings related to total parent involvement. Total scale scores were consistent across the parents/guardians of 7th and 8th grade students, $F(1, 374) = .128$, $p = .720$.

Table 4.8a: African American Parent/Guardian Activities Across Student Grade Level

Grade	7th Grade %*			8th Grade %		
	Never	1-2 or Few Times	Many	Never	1-2 or Few Times	Many
Talk to my child about school.	.5	9	91	.5	8	91
Visit my child's classroom.	11	57	32	12	58	32
Read to my child.	21	44	35	23	36	38
Listen to my child read.	13	30	57	11	35	54
Listen to a story my child wrote.	11	37	53	15	37	49
Help my child with homework.	4	25	71	7	24	69
Practice spelling and other skills before a test.	11	33	57	18	28	54
Talk with my child about a TV show.	8	39	53	8	33	60
Help my child plan for homework/chores.	3	25	72	3	50	69
Talk with my child's teacher at school.	7	47	46	8	49	42
Talk with my child's teacher on the phone.	16	54	30	16	59	26
Go to PTA/PTO meetings.	67	25	8	62	30	9
Check to see if my child has done his/her homework.	5	20	75	7	22	72
Volunteer at school/in my child's classroom.	51	34	15	56	30	14
Go to a special event at school.	14	30	47	13	44	43
Take my child to a library.	17	44	31	17	47	37
Take my child to special places or events in the community.	9	41	50	8	34	57
Tell my child how important school is.	.5	4	96	1	5	93

*n = 382

Table 4.8b: Mean Differences Across School Sites				
School Site		Welcomeness	Trust	Parent Involvement
Traditional School #1	Mean	114.8542	56.9583	56.0208
	Std. Deviation	35.79973	19.09032	10.06608
Traditional School #2	Mean	135.3333	68.6667	50.5000
	Std. Deviation	34.12135	18.82197	14.26534
Traditional School #4	Mean	126.5283	60.5094	54.6792
	Std. Deviation	27.77354	17.84939	11.40137
Traditional School #5	Mean	121.3276	57.0517	56.4138
	Std. Deviation	35.64709	19.54520	10.48480
Traditional School #6	Mean	121.7625	58.5625	57.2875
	Std. Deviation	31.99851	19.15615	9.73730
Traditional School #8	Mean	125.8182	60.4545	52.3182
	Std. Deviation	33.75773	18.57988	11.41589
Traditional School #9	Mean	113.5263	47.0000	48.3684
	Std. Deviation	22.24452	17.19819	13.33421
Independent School #1	Mean	106.6042	49.7917	55.3750
	Std. Deviation	33.42107	18.39398	10.60434
Total	Mean	118.7539	56.7906	55.3979
	Std. Deviation	33.29912	19.06648	10.75662

ANOVA found differences in the total parent involvement mean scores across parents' educational levels, F (6, 369) = 3.606, p = .002. Post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using the Tukey test (Tukey, 1953). Of the seven educational groups represented in this study, differences existed between the "No Diploma" group and the "Some College" group (p=.03) as well as the "No Diploma" group and the "Bachelor's Degree" group (p=.018). As a measure of effect size, Cohen's d was calculated to estimate the strength and importance of the significant relationships found between parent education and parent involvement (Cohen, 1988). Between the "No Diploma" group and the "Some College" groups, Cohen's d = .67, which is considered a moderate relationship. Between the "No Diploma" group and the "Bachelor's Degree" group, Cohen's d = .87, which is considered a strong relationship.

To understand if and how familiarity with and frequency on school campuses might impact parent involvement scores, an ANOVA was conducted. It was determined that total parent involvement scale scores were not consistent across all visitation types, F (6, 375) = 12.244, p = .000. Tukey post hoc testing identified where the mean differences were. Of the visit groups compared here, significant differences were found between "daily" visitors and "less than once a month" visitors (p = .001; d = 1.02, a large effect), "special occasion" visitors (p = .000; d = 1.05, a large effect), and those who "never" visited (p = .000; d = 1.45, a large effect); between "3-5 times a week" visitors and "special occasion" visitors (p = .000; d = .71, a moderate effect) and those who "never" visited (p = .000; d = 1.17, a large effect); between "1-2 times a week" visitors and "less than once a month visitors" (p = .004; d = .81, a large effect), special occasion" visitors

(p = .000; d = .87, a large effect), and those who "never" visited (p = .000; d = 1.31, a large effect); "monthly" visitors and "special occasion" visitors (p = .001; d = .61, a moderate effect) and those who "never" visited (p = .000; d = 1.09, a large effect); as well as between "less than once a month" visitors and those who "never" visited (p = .03; d = .77, a large effect). It was clear that total parent involvement scores differed significantly between parents who frequented their child's school and those who did not.

To understand if school locale had any bearing on involvement practices, an ANOVA was conducted on these data (see Table 4.8b), and it was found that total parent involvement scale scores were not consistent across all school sites, F (6, 375) = 12.244, p = .000. To determine exactly where the mean differences were, post hoc comparisons were conducted using the Tukey HSD test. Of the compared schools, only Traditional School #6 and Traditional School #9 registered a significant difference (p = .018).

Research Question 2: What are African American parents' perceptions of their child/children's school's "welcomeness" level?

To address Research Question 2 and better understand how welcoming African American parents/guardians perceived their child's school to be, a descriptive analysis of the data was compiled in an effort to identify preliminary similarities and differences. Next, a total score was calculated for each participant who completed the *School Welcomeness Scale*. Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to assist in difference interpretation with regard to student grade, parent educational level, and parent visitation practices. A thread common to all twenty of the items is a parent/guardian's ability to engage in a welcoming, receptive, and inclusionary experience with their child's school.

Relative to student grade level, 53% of 7th graders' parents/guardians stated that they felt welcome in their child's school, while 47% of 8th grade parents responded in the same way (see Table 4.1). There appeared to be no overarching differences in participants' responses. ANOVA was conducted to examine total welcomeness scores across student grade levels and no significant differences were found, $F(1, 380) = .098$, $p = .754$.

When asked if they felt welcome in their children's school, 90% of respondents across all educational groups answered "yes". The groups that felt most welcome in the schools were the "master degree" educated parents (95%); "trade" educated parents (74%) felt least welcome (see Table 4.1). ANOVA found total welcomeness scores inconsistent across educational groups, $F(6, 375) = 2.248$, $p = .038$. To determine exactly where the mean differences were, post hoc comparisons were conducted using both the Tukey and Scheffe (1953) tests; however, no significant differences were found, resulting in an inconsistency between the F test and the subsequent post hoc tests. When using post hoc tests, it is possible to have circumstances in which either (1) the F test presents a significant outcome yet no two groups are different on the post hoc, pairwise comparisons, or (2) the F test is not significant but if pairwise comparisons had been performed, there would have been noticeable variations between the means (Hancock & Klockars, 1996). To gain a better understanding of the effect size or magnitude of the effect of educational background on welcomeness score ratings, eta squared was calculated. It was determined that the degree of association between the two variables was a small one, $\eta^2 = .038$.

In terms of visitation practices, total mean welcomeness scores were similar. Regardless of how much parents/guardians frequented school campuses, 80% to 100% of all visitation groups reported feeling welcome – 100% of daily visitors answered "yes", while 81% of "special occasion" visitors responded the same way. Interestingly enough, those who never visited the school reported that they felt just as welcome as those who visited 3-5 time a week (see Table 4.1). ANOVA discovered that total welcomeness scores were not consistent across all parent visitation groups, $F(6, 375) = 3.910$, $p = .001$. Post hoc comparisons were conducted using the Tukey test and significant differences were found amongst "daily" visitors and "less than once a month" visitors ($p = .009$; $d = .76$, a moderate effect), as well as "1-2 times a week" visitors and "less than once a month" visitors ($p = .003$; $d = .78$, a moderate effect).

With regard to school locale, an ANOVA was conducted (see Table 4.8b), and it was found that total welcomeness scale scores were not consistent across all schools, $F(7, 374) = 2.120$, $p = .041$. To determine exactly where the mean differences lie, post hoc comparisons were conducted using the Tukey HSD test and, of the schools compared, only Independent School #1 and Traditional School #4 registered a significant difference ($p = .052$).

Research Question 3: Do African American parents consider their children's schools trustworthy?

To address Research Question 3 and understand how trustworthy African American parents/guardians found their children's school, a descriptive analysis of the data was compiled in an effort to identify preliminary similarities and differences. Next, a total

score was calculated for each participant who completed the *School Trust Scale*. Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to assist in difference interpretation with regard to student grade, parent educational level, and parent visitation practices. A thread common to all of the items is a parent/guardian's ability to put their trust in their child's school—specifically, that the school had their child's best interest at heart and was a caring entity that was capable of educating their child in a safe environment.

When asked directly if they trusted their child's school, 85% of 7^{th} and 8^{th} grade parents reported that they did. Descriptively, there were no obvious differences in parent/guardian responses when the age of their child was considered—86% of 7^{th} graders' parents/guardians reported that they trusted their child's school, while 84% of 8^{th} graders' parents/guardians responded similarly (see Table 4.1). According to ANOVA, no significant differences were found. Total school trust scale scores were consistent across all student grade levels, $F(1, 380) = .280$, $p = .597$.

When asked if they trusted their children's school, 85% of respondents across all educational groups answered "yes". Most trusting were "diploma" educated parents (91%); least trusting were "trade" educated participants (63%). According to ANOVA, no significant differences were found. Total school trust scale scores were consistent across all parent educational levels, $F(6, 375) = 1.893$, $p = .081$. No significant differences were found in either of those group comparisons.

In terms of visitation practices, more parents/guardians who visited their child's school daily (97%) considered their children's school trustworthy than any other visitation group. Least trusting were parents/guardians who visited less than once a

month (77%). Interestingly, 85% of participants who never visited their child's school considered the campus trustworthy. Total school trust scale scores were not consistent across all parent visitation groups, $F(6, 375) = 2.285$, $p = .035$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test revealed differences between "daily" visitors and "less than once a month" visitors ($p = .014$; $d = .75$, a moderate effect).

To understand if school locale had any bearing on trust scores; however there seems to be an inconsistency between the F test and the subsequent post hoc tests. As a result, no significant differences were uncovered amongst the schools via post hoc; yet, to gain a better understanding of the effect size or magnitude of the effect of school locale on trust score ratings, eta squared was calculated. It was determined that the degree of association between the two variables was a small one, $\eta^2 = .046$.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between "welcomeness", school trust, and African American parent involvement practices?

To address Research Question 4, total scores were computed for the *School Welcomeness Scale,* the *Parents' Involvement on All Types of Activities Scale,* and the *Parent Trust of School Scale*. Next, a regression analysis of the criterion variable -- the total score for *Parents' Involvement on All Types of Activities Scale* -- on the total scores for the *School Welcomeness Scale,* the *School Trust Scale,* and on both scales together.

There was a high, positive correlation between school welcomeness and school trust ($r = .894$). Low, positive correlations were found between school welcomeness and parent involvement ($r = .208$), as well as school trust and parent involvement ($r = .123$).

Tables 4.9 – 4.11 report the proportions of variance accounted for in the *Parents' Involvement on All Types of Activities Scale* score by the two factors. Also reported is the incremental change in the F ratio, as well as the zero-order correlation coefficients and the corresponding tests of significance. The current model accounted for a statistically significant proportion of variance in the criterion variable at the .05 alpha level. While both variables exhibited a significant effect, school welcomeness (r^2 = .043) accounted for more variability in parent involvement scores than school trust (r^2 =.015); however, together, they accounted for a larger amount (r^2 = .063).

Table 4.9: Regression of Parent Involvement on School Welcomeness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.208[a]	.043	.041	10.53595	.043	17.127	1	380	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Wtot

b. Dependent Variable: PItot

Table 4.10: Regression of Parent Involvement School Trust

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.123[a]	.015	.013	10.68908	.015	5.830	1	380	.016

a. Predictors: (Constant), PRtot

b. Dependent Variable: PItot

Table 4.11: Multiple Regression of Parent Involvement on Both Scales

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.251[a]	.063	.058	10.44099	.063	12.691	2	379	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Wtot, PRtot

b. Dependent Variable: PItot

Summary

The current study addressed four separate research questions via four distinct analyses – factor analysis, descriptive analysis, ANOVA, and regression. The first research question addressed the involvement practices of African American parents/guardians. An ANOVA was performed and mean differences were considered with regard to student grade level, parent educational level, and parent visitation efforts. With regard to involvement practices, it was determined that no significant differences existed with regard to student grade level. Significant differences were encountered where parent educational level, parent visitation frequency, and school locale were examined.

The second research question concerned African American parents/guardians' perceptions of school welcomeness, using the researcher-developed *School Welcomeness Scale*. The instrument was designed to measure parent perceptions of welcomeness using a twenty-item scale across two factors, inclusion and reception. To this end, an ANOVA was conducted as well as a principal factor analysis. Reliability and validity estimates for the instrument were reported and considered acceptable. The data collected identified one very large and one relatively small factor on the *School Welcomeness Scale*. In addition, ANOVA was performed with regard to student grade level, parent/guardian educational level, parent visitation frequency, and school locale. No significant differences were found between the parents of 7^{th} and 8^{th} grade students with regard to welcomeness ratings. Results indicated that significant mean differences existed with regard to parent visitation practices, specifically between frequent visitors (e.g., "daily"

and “1-2 time a week”) and “less than once a month” visitors. Significant differences were also found between Independent School #1 and Traditional School #4. While meaningful discrepancies also existed with regard to parent educational levels and school locale, it was determined that the strength of association between the parent educational background and school welcomeness was a small one.

The third research question addressed African American parents/guardians’ perceptions of school trust, using the *Parent Trust of School Scale*. The instrument was designed to measure parent perceptions of school trust using a ten-item scale. To better understand the instrument’s structure, a factor analysis was performed followed by an ANOVA to identify significant mean differences across groups. The factor analysis identified one component. ANOVA was utilized to analyze data in terms of student grade level, parent/guardian educational level, parent visitation frequency, and school locale. No significant differences were found in the trust ratings with regard to student grade level or parent education levels. Results indicated that significant mean differences existed with regard to parent visitation practices, specifically between “daily” visitors and “less than once a month” visitors. A small strength of association was found between school trust scores and site locale.

The fourth research question concentrated on the relationships among school welcomeness, school trust, and parent involvement. A high, positive correlation was found between school welcomeness and school trust. Small, positive correlations existed between school welcomeness and parent involvement, as well as parent involvement and school trust. The two variables, school trust and parent involvement, together accounted

for a larger variance in school welcomeness scores. It was determined that school trust and school welcomeness were significant predictors of parent involvement.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate the educational involvement practices of 7th and 8th grade, African American parents in two public school districts located in a Midwestern metropolitan area. Specifically, the study's objectives were to learn (1) how African American parents and guardians were involved in their child's schooling, (2) if parents felt welcome in the school, and (3) if parents trusted their children's school. Attention was also given to identifying relationships between parent involvement practices, as well as parent perceptions of school welcomeness and school trust.

Involvement Practices of African American Parents/Guardians

The first research question was aimed at exploring exactly how parents were involved in school after taking into account the influence of student grade level, parent educational backgrounds, as well as the frequency of parent visitation practices. Previous studies show that African American families who are of lower educational levels, are subject to more restrictive work schedules (Smith, 2001), and who are of lower socio-economic status (Griffith, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986) may be less involved than families who do not face such limitations.

In terms of student grade level, there were numerous resemblances among parents, as they appeared to engage in comparable activities at similar rates. This finding is supportive of research indicating that student grade level has no bearing on involvement practices (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

While African American parents reported participation in many involvement activities, the activities in which they reported the most involvement were talking with their children about school and stressing the importance of education. The activities in which parents were least involved were attending PTA/PTO meetings and classroom volunteerism. This finding was supported by previous research documenting that while African Americans' do value education (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Ramirez, 2003) they exhibit a lack of representation in more visible, traditional involvement activities (McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003). These results may have a foundation in previous research chronicling a reduction in parent involvement practices as students matriculate through middle and secondary grades (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999). These findings may also lend support to studies outlining the impact of involvement barriers, such an inflexible work scheduling, lack of transportation, or educational background, and their ability to depress parent efforts (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Kohl et al, 2000; Shumow & Miller, 2001). Reportedly, the activities in which these African Americans most participated are away from school campuses or in the home, which has been identified as having the most impact on academic achievement (Ho & Willms, 1996; Muller, 1993).

Consistent with research (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Griffith, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Smith, 2001), African Americans with lower economic and academic resources were less involved in their child's school. In this study, the "No Diploma" parent group reported less involvement than the "Some College" and the "Bachelor's Degree" parent groups. The expectation, then, was to also see similar patterns with "associate degreed" and "master's degreed" parents. It is unclear why these outcomes did not surface. Though confounding, these findings only lend nominal support to a belief that parent educational background is positively related to school involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Kaplan, Kaplan, & Liu, 2000) since parents who have more education are often more involved with their children's educational process and are clearer about their expectations (Griffith, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

With regard to the frequency of parents/guardians' campus visitation practices and parent involvement ratings, significant differences were uncovered. In the current study, the majority of parents reported regular visits to their child's school (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly). As found in previous studies, the participants who visited schools frequently reported more involvement activity than those who visited irregularly (e.g., special occasions, never). Here, the motivation for regular parent visitations could be attributed to the parent's comfort level within the school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993), more flexible work schedules (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Kaplan et al., 2000), or response to school's requests for participation (Ames, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey

et al., 1997). These findings imply that parent involvement may increase if schools schedule activities when parents are available and encourage their attendance.

Finally, with regard to school locale, it was discovered that significant differences were found Traditional School #6 (a school with a large African American student population, situated in a densely African American populated area) and Traditional School #9 (a school that houses a more equally diverse student population on the northwest side of the city, where there are fewer African Americans). Participants reported more involvement at Traditional School #6 than at Traditional School #9. It is unclear why parent involvement scores were so different between these schools, other than a demographic attribution.

School Welcomeness and African American Parents/Guardians

The second research question of the current study was aimed at exploring how African American parents/guardians perceived the level of welcomeness in their child's school. Relative to student grade level, 7th and 8th graders' parents/guardians stated that they felt equally welcome in their child's school; across all educational groups, 90% of respondents answered "yes" when asked directly. While the largest percentage of welcomeness was reported by higher educated parents (e.g., master degreed), only a small, significant relationship across welcomeness levels and educational background was found. Even still, this finding lends support to previous research (Molland, 2004) which established that less educated parents may feel more out of place in schools than their more educated counterparts.

In terms of visitation practices, regardless of how much parents/guardians frequented school campuses, when asked directly, 80% to 100% of all visitation groups reported feeling welcome. Interestingly enough, those who never visited the school reported that they felt just as welcome as those who visited daily. While an overwhelming majority of parents said they felt welcome, significant differences in welcomeness score ratings were found between participants who reported visiting school campuses daily or weekly, and those that visited less than once a month. These findings support previous research suggesting that increased association with schools has the potential to encourage feelings of connectivity and comfort (Bempechat, 1992).

Finally, with regard to school locale, it was discovered that significant differences were found between Independent School #1 (a school with a large African American student population, situated in a densely African American populated area) and Traditional School #9 (a school with more diversity in terms of student population, but is still densely populated by African American students and located on the northwest side of the city). Participants rated Independent School #1 less welcoming than Traditional School #9. The data collected here did not offer much insight into why parents/guardians found differences in these two school sites in spite of their heavy African American enrollment.

School Trust and African American Parents/Guardians

When asked if they trusted their child's school, parents/guardians of 7th and 8th grade students reported they did. There were no obvious differences in participant responses when the age of their child was considered—7th and 8th graders' parents/guardians

reported that they trusted their child's school at equal rates. With regard to education, 85% of respondents across all educational groups reported their child's school trustworthy. While, percentage-wise, diploma-educated parents reported being most trusting, no significant differences were found on welcomeness scale scores in terms of education.

Where visitation practices were concerned, parents/guardians who visited their child's school daily viewed the school as more trustworthy than any other group; least trusting were participants who visited less than once a month (Barnes, Mitchell, Forsyth, & Adams, 2005). Interestingly, 85% of participants who never visited their child's school considered the campus trustworthy. Significant differences were found in trust responses between "daily" visitors and "less than once a month" visitors, which were supported by previous research (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Luhman, 1979), indicating that familiarity is essential to trust development.

In terms of school locale and school trust, a small association found. Specifically, parents rated Traditional School #2 as more trusting than Independent School #1. Traditional School #2 was located on the southwest side of the city where there was a larger Hispanic population and fewer African American students. Independent School #1 had a considerably larger African American student population and located on the northwest side of the city. Again, the data offered limited insight into why these two schools registered such differences on the trust scale.

The Relationships among Trust, Welcomeness, and Parent Involvement

The fourth research question of the current study was focused on understanding the relationship amongst school trust, school welcomeness, and parent involvement for African American parents/guardians. A large, positive association was found between school welcomeness and school trust. Small, positive relationships were found between school welcomeness and parent involvement, as well as school trust and parent involvement. These findings indicate that although positive changes may be seen in parent involvement when welcomeness and trust are increased individually, when positive changes in the two concepts are paired together, differences in parent involvement are even greater. These outcomes lends some support previous research, which finds that parent involvement rates tend to be higher in schools that create an inviting climate (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), as well as research indicating that parents who trust the school tend to be more active in the school (Barnes et. al, 2005).

Conclusions

It is apparent through self report, that participants in this study feel welcome in and are trusting of their children's schools; however, their involvement practices leaves much to be desired in terms of classical characterization. Although a positive relationship between parent involvement, school welcomeness, and trust exists, it appears that establishing a connection between those concepts has not been enough to elicit the change schools want to see across the African American community.

Theoretically, when parents/guardians find school climates welcoming or inviting, they become more involved. In addition, this increased familiarity parents develop with

the school, supposedly, allows for a natural progression towards trust building, which further induces involvement. If this line of thinking is correct, then what, exactly, promotes parental engagement in the types of practices schools consider important? What can schools do to increase the probability of school welcomeness and trust in parents/guardians? Obviously, something is occurring in schools that advance welcoming and trustworthy feelings in the African American parents/guardians involved in this study. Site to site variations were apparent, which suggests that schools do things to impact the way parents/guardians perceive them. The most welcoming and trusting schools in this site are clearly doing something to encourage parent comfort, but what? And, if welcoming traits are already present in a school, what needs to occur before parents' feelings of welcomeness transition into those of trust? While welcomeness and school trust work to increase parent involvement, exactly how those two factors combine to influence more visible, on-campus involvement activity among some African American middle school parents remains unclear.

While parent perception is powerful and is impacted by numerous variables to include past experiences, schools play a role in the corroboration of those views. Schools must ask themselves what they are doing to promote or depress meaningful relationships with parents. It stands to reason that if schools want to increase parent involvement in their buildings, first a clear examination of its program must take place, in terms of how its attributes encourage or discourage familial engagement. Next, standards for parent involvement must be constructed and shared with both the community and staff. Then, a reasonable strategy about how to meet those standards as partners must be developed,

keeping in mind the community's context and available resources. School welcomeness and trust are important pieces in this puzzle, since issues such as helpful staff members, clean campuses, and visitor-friendly offices are also impact-making features that shape parents' decisions about if and when they might return.

Customarily, teachers spend much of their time contacting and learning from the parents of at-risk students. Equally, parents of at-risk students spend much of their time researching resources in an effort to gain assistance. Could it be that parents based much of their decision-making about involvement on a perception of student need, which is rooted in the "no news is good news" adage? Perhaps, the historical villainization of all unseen parents has been a little too harsh. Maybe parents are not visiting the schools because they believe there is no good reason to do so. Perhaps, to African American parents, no calls from the school have been equivocated to a lack of teacher concern about their child's inability to perform, as well as an approval to continue with their efforts just as they are until their children's needs change.

Implications

Since previous research has drawn a consensus between the importance of parent involvement and student success, school efforts towards bonding with the community in an attempt to heal the "disconnect" in terms of involvement practices is key. Identification of the most effective involvement practices must not only be pursued, but promoted. While parents tend to be involved more at the primary levels, their endeavors seem to deteriorate as students matriculate through school, resulting in less visible participation from parents at the high school level. This change in activity begs to

question “why?” Therefore, the impact of perception and trust on parental involvement are far-reaching and maintain relevance across every level of instruction.

If African Americans conceptualize and partake in parent involvement in less effective ways than other ethnic groups, their ability to efficiently contribute to their child’s academic experience may impede the quality and success of each student’s efforts based on the type and amount of activities in which parents choose to engage. As a result, schools are charged with assessing the needs of their community and meeting them in an effort to promote improved home-school partnerships. Efforts to improve their community image in terms of welcomeness and trust must be addressed. In addition, if schools are to become more apt at conveying to communities exactly how parents can effectively partner with and support the educational process (both on and away from campus), efforts towards school reform may be improved.

Recommendations

There is an obvious disconnect between schools and parents where parent involvement is concerned. Although African Americans may report that they understand the important role parent involvement plays in the educational process, their perceptions do not seem to correlate with outward, more visible behavior. As a result, schools should champion the creation of a plan to effectively reach and teach their clientele. Parents need to understand the potential impact of their involvement efforts; consequently, the goal should be to transform parent behavior through mass excitement with an agenda of eliciting an emotional response, which will ultimately motivate action and effect change. Traditional methodologies of communicating with parents via letters home, school

newsletters, and word of mouth should not be discounted; however, more creative efforts should be considered.

How can African American families be reached? There are several good-faith agencies/organizations in the community that are willing to partner with education enthusiasts. Starting with the obvious, many African American families attend church and find clerical personnel, particularly the pastor, trustworthy. It may be useful to partner with the church in an attempt to circulate the message. In addition, other associations like sororities and fraternities, Masonic temple members, and a variety of grassroots organizations, may be willing to unite with schools, learn more about the mobilization effort, and contribute their own resources (be it time or financial support) in an attempt to activate the community.

Trainings are helpful tools. Utilizing platforms such as Parent University conferences or PTA/PTO meetings may present another opportunity to share information about involvement with a captured audience. Using a skilled or educated person to lead this effort provides validity to the information being shared as well as the identification of a familiar resource. Remaining unassuming, realizing that parents/guardians are not privy to the same information in equal amounts, and providing practical guides for parent involvement across all levels of competence may help to create a non-threatening environment for idea sharing and, depending on locale, an opportunity for parents to view the school in a more supportive role. Additionally, gathering parents together allows for the creation of social networks, thereby establishing a sense of community and support, which encourages an investment in education as an institution rather than a haphazard

occurrence. Finally, such trainings offer an opportunity to increase parent/guardian community awareness providing organizations a chance to make contact with potential clientele, promote their mission, and advertise their services to many of whom they might not otherwise have access.

Public service announcements are an excellent method of reaching large numbers of people at one time. Partnering with local radio and television stations to secure free air time, as well as newspapers and other local print media, allows schools to distribute messages to an array of people. Here, the use of repetitive campaigning offers parents/guardians numerous opportunities to make contact with the school's message, while also increasing consumer familiarity. In addition, message blasts using technologies like text messaging and social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) are outstanding ways of connecting with younger, more technologically savvy family members. Schools may even consider securing a social networking page, where they can announce information and reach a subset of the clientele who may not be able or open to connecting with community agencies in person or attending workshops/seminars. For those parents who subscribe to email accounts and have access to the Internet, utilizing school web pages and the creation of web rings may also be worthwhile endeavors.

Incentives should also be addressed as a part of any parent involvement improvement plan. Ideas about what motivates parents should be taken into account. Since the issue of parent involvement improvement is one that requires the entire school districts' buy in, district-wide programming may prove most appropriate. For example, schools may decide to identify a "parent of the month" using a set of criteria set forth by the

organization itself. School competitions could result into a district-wide competition of all the site-identified nominees, resulting in a "parent of the year" award, complete with photographs, newspaper citations, and certain district-prescribed privileges. Using such incentives allows parents an opportunity to be recognized for reaching an achievement, but would also result in increased school involvement as interested parents worked to achieve the distinction.

An arrangement similar to the four-pronged plan presented here, including: traditional methods of communication, the introduction of technology, partnerships with community agencies/organizations, and incentives, is only one way schools can become better facilitators of education, improve home-school relations, provide learning opportunities, and build a rapport with the community. Such programming forces educational agencies to think beyond what is normally done in an effort to elicit a different response in the hopes of bridging the gap between what parents already know and what schools need them to know. Parents may not understand that what they are able to offer is important until someone tells them.

Recommendations for Further Studies

In view of the fact that there is an obvious link between welcomeness, trust and parent involvement, it would be exciting to learn more about how parents conceptualize parent involvement and better understand the roles they have assigned to themselves and the schools as actors in their children's educational process. Since it appears that a noticeable difference exists between parents' and schools' conceptualization of involvement, it may be meaningful to better understand how parents perceive their

responsibilities and the responsibilities of the school, and how those perceptions inform involvement practices.

Another interesting study would be an examination of the impact of campus-based involvement practices (e.g., serving as a classroom assistant, joining the PTA/PTO). Of the two categories, home-based involvement has been reported to have the most impact on academic performance. If campus-based involvement activities do not provide parents and students the greatest return academically, then why encourage them? Other than a pathway to strengthening home-school relationships and trust-building, is the service of on-campus involvement grounded in resource/network expansion? If so, who (in terms of students, staff, and parents) most benefits from those practices?

Given that communication is an important aspect of establishing and maintaining home-school relationships, it would be useful to explore how advanced technology can be utilized to embrace parents who were traditionally isolated from the school. Would it be practical for schools to invest in newer modalities (e.g., text messaging, email rings, social networking sites)? How would those efforts transform into positive changes in involvement practices and student achievement?

Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct further research on the concept of welcomeness and its theoretical foundations, and how trust and trustworthiness differ in terms of the parents' ownership of trust perception, and the school's possession of certain attributes, which could be categorized as trustworthy. Future studies which concentrate on welcomeness construct development and its relationship to school trust and trustworthiness would include an examination how school welcomeness and school trust:

(a) change from one ethnic group to another (Do all cultural groups find the same elements of a school welcoming or trustworthy?); (b) changes in terms of gender (What elements help men and women construct welcomeness and trust perceptions about schools?); and, (c) work together to encourage parent involvement activity selection (How do perceptions of welcomeness and trust work together to inform parent involvement selections?).

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APPENDICES

PARENT SURVEY

Instructions:

THANK YOU!!! We are so glad that you agreed to participate. The purpose of this survey is to help us determine how we are performing as a school and where we might make changes. Your input will help us achieve this goal.

Before you begin, please read the statements listed below and place a check mark in the box beside the answer that best describes you. *Do not leave any blank spaces.*

1. My child attends …	□ Traditional #1 □ Traditional #2 □ Traditional #3 □ Traditional #4	□ Traditional #5 □ Traditional #6 □ Traditional #7 □ Traditional #8	□ Traditional #9 □ Independent #1
2. My child is a student in…	□ 7th Grade	□ 8th Grade	
3. I am this child's…	□ Parent □ Grandparent	□ Sister/Brother □ Uncle/Aunt/Cousin	□ Other □ I am not related.
4. I am a …	□ Male	□ Female	
5. I have the following years of education…	□ No Diploma □ Diploma □ Trade	□ Some College □ Associate's Degree □ Bachelor's Degree	□ Master's Degree □ Doctoral Degree
6. My job may be considered to be part of the following category/profession	□ Construction □ Education/Training □ Postal Service	□ Health Services □ Human Services □ Computer Tech □ Entertainment	□ Administrative □ Transportation □ Military □ Custodial	□ Farming □ Sales □ Other
7. I feel welcome at this school.	□ Yes	□ No	
8. I trust this school.	□ Yes	□ No	
9. DURING THIS SCHOOL YEAR, I have visited the <u>INSIDE</u> of this school building …	□ Daily □ 3-5 times a week □ 1-2 times a week	□ Monthly □ Less than once a month	□ Special occasions □ Never

PARENT SURVEY
(Page 2 of 4)

Instructions: Thinking about the *current school year*, please read the list of statements below. The items below permit a range of responses from one extreme on the left (strongly disagree) to the other extreme on the right (strongly agree). By circling one number in each row, please indicate how you feel about your child's school. Circled numbers close to the "1" or "8" suggest more intense feeling.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. The building is clean and well organized.	1	2	3	4	5
2. It is clear what the school's goals are for my child's education.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	1	2	3	4	5
4. When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	1	2	3	4	5
6. When I leave a message for a teacher/staff, my call is returned.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am informed of important meetings/special school events.	1	2	3	4	5
9. School staff members are easily accessible.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I know the name(s) of my child's teacher(s).	1	2	3	4	5
12. I know the name(s) of my child's administrator(s).	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	1	2	3	4	5
14. School administration treats all students fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The teachers treat all students equally.	1	2	3	4	5
16. This school provides a safe environment for everyone.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	1	2	3	4	5
19. The staff and students interact respectfully.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I visit the school when I am asked to come.	1	2	3	4	5

PARENT SURVEY

(Page 3 of 4)

Please review the following items and indicate how you feel about your child's school. Circled numbers close to the "1" or "8" suggest more intense feeling.

	Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1. This school always does what it is supposed to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2. This school keeps me well informed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3. I really trust this school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
4. Kids at this school are well cared for.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
5. This school is always honest with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
6. This school does a terrific job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
7. This school has high standards for all kids.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
8. This school is always ready to help.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9. I never worry about my child when he/she's at school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
10. At this school, I know I'll be listened to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Families get involved in different ways at school or at home. Which of the following have you done <u>this year</u> with the 7th or 8th grade child you have at this school? Please CIRCLE one choice for each item.

NEVER – means you do NOT do this or NOT YET this year
1-2 TIMES – means you have done this ONE or TWO times this year
A FEW TIMES – means you have done this a FEW TIMES this year
MANY TIMES – means you have done this MANY TIMES this year

1. Talk to my child about school.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
2. Visit my child's classroom.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
3. Read to my child.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
4. Listen to my child read.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
5. Listen to a story my child wrote	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times

PARENT SURVEY

(Page 4 of 4)

6. Help my child with homework.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
7. Practice spelling or other skills before a test.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
8. Talk with my child about a TV show.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
9. Help my child plan time for homework/chores.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
10. Talk with my child's teacher at school.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
11. Talk with my child's teacher on the phone.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
12. Go to PTA/PTO meetings.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
13. Check to see that my child has done his/her homework.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
14. Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
15. Go to special events at school.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
16. Take my child to a library.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
17. Take my child to special places or events in the community.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times
18. Tell my child how important school is.	Never do	1-2 Times	Few Times	Many Times

Thinking about your involvement experience, please answer the following questions:

1. How would you rate your involvement experience?	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Negative
2. What has been the quality of your interaction with this school?	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Negative

Validation of the School Welcomeness Scale (SWS)

Abstract

Schools are being held accountable for student academic performance and research has proven that parental involvement is critical to the educational process. However, research has also suggested that parental involvement is often times contingent upon parental perception of the schooling entity. Consequently, how welcoming a school appears to be has some influence this perception. To support the promotion of parental involvement, organizations must be able to assess progress towards their goal. This paper presents a new instrument to assist in the assessment of school welcomeness, specifically in the areas of inclusion and reception: the School Welcomeness Scale (SWS). This paper also discusses the theoretically based definition of this new construct, the development process, and a potential validation plan for the SWS. Exploratory factor analyses supported the a priori hypothesis of the two-dimensional paradigm, allowing for some preliminary support for construct validity. Results also show evidence for the internal consistency of the School Welcomeness Scale.

Validation of the School Welcomeness Scale (SWS)

Introduction

The importance of parent involvement in children's schooling has long been a persistent theme in school reform efforts. Although a difference of opinion exists (Casanova, 1996; de Carvalho, 2001; Henry, 1996), studies show that when parents are involved in the educational process, students' classroom performance often improves (Jeynes, 2005). However, to be successful in attracting parental or familial involvement, schools first bear the task of making those groups feel welcome; families must believe that school is a place for them (Tomlinson, 1996).

With more parents entering the workforce, increasing societal demands, and the ever changing structure and dilapidated role of the family, have all been rationales used to explain the obvious reduction of parent involvement in the educational process. Jeynes (2005) identifies parental involvement as one of the most crucial factors necessary to raise the achievement of minority and disadvantaged children. This issue is of particular importance as African American students tend to perform less well, academically, than other ethnic groups when standardized test scores, GPA, drop out rates, etc., are taken into account.

While research indicates that parental involvement in the home has the most impact on academic achievement, studies show that parental involvement in the school can offer positive academic payoffs as well (Ho and Willms, 1996; Muller & Kerbow, 1993). However, how parents view schools does have an impact on their desire to become involved (Smith, 2001). For these reasons, the purpose of the instrument

developed in this paper is to determine parent and/or family's perception of school welcomeness in their child's current educational setting.

School Welcomeness. For the purposes of this paper, *school welcomeness* is defined as a state of agreeableness and/or kind reception in a school. The construct can be considered multidimensional in that it considers perceptual responses based on parental/familial interaction with the school – specifically with teachers/staff members, as well as the general building/campus environment; in particular, a parent's impression of the school.

While there are many reasons for parents and families to visit schools, there are probably just as many reasons why they choose not to. Parents or families may feel unable to negotiate the system; they may work two or more jobs and have limited time in their schedules; they may be less educated and may feel intimidated by the school environment; or, they may feel socially out of place (Molland, 2004). Henderson and Mapp (2002) go on to identify a numerous barriers to school and familial trust-building: bad first impressions; poor communication; parents' (or family members') past experiences; parents' (or family members') lack of self-confidence; teachers' lack of confidence; history of discrimination; differing expectations of parent-teacher roles; and, lack of confidence in the school.

If home-school partnerships are going to be effective, each entity must be able and willing to trust one another (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003). Trust, according to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003), is defined as "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party

is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open." Consequently, the notion of trust is deeply interwoven within the concept of welcomeness. When we consider the inviting nature of a school, issues surrounding the students' (educational) interest, staff reliability, professionalism, competence and honesty, as well as home-school communication, are all issues of which families share a common interest. Research suggests that schools with higher levels of trust are more likely to successfully implement and sustain academic reform more so than schools with lower levels of trust (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003). In addition, schools demonstrating high levels of teacher-family and teacher-principal trust are generally characterized as having more stable populations; minimal "racial and ethnic tensions" among students, parents, and staff; and educators are able to provide parents with clear evidence "that students are learning" (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003).

Schools that are successful in eliciting parental engagement often focus on three main areas: collaborative relationship-building; respect maintenance of cultural, class and/or ethnic needs/differences; and promotion of home-school partnerships (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Miretzky (2004) found that preservation of diversity and difference is a crucial part of establishing cohesion among school stakeholders. This unification, then, should be founded on an acceptance of differences, commitment to the common good, and recognition that the school and its environment are interdependent.

Tomlinson (1996) lists a number of strategies that schools can use to welcome parents and families into their doors, including: initiating frequent communication (regarding student progress, current lesson plans, etc.); engaging in two-way communication (using

newsletters, parent conference times, telephone calls); providing opportunities for parents and families to come to the school (e.g., Open House, student showcases, parent workshops); offering to accommodate parents (e.g., meet parents away from school, conducting home visits, etc.); discovering and overcoming barriers to involvement (e.g., language, childcare, transportation); establishing a parent and/or family resource center that can provide a wealth of information to parents and families (e.g., parent workshops, booklets and brochures, opportunities to meet/share ideas/experiences with other parents); creating a Parent Involvement Coordinator position; providing training to parents; providing training to teachers on how to deal with parents; supporting staff efforts to involve parents; and, developing of a sense of community.

Problem Statement

Parent involvement figures centrally in the national goals for improving education (National Education Goals Panel, 1994) and in many current school reform models. Increased parental involvement can improve student achievement, since much of a student's attitudes about education come from his or her family. The perception that parents hold of schools and their professional staff determined whether they would be involved or disenchanted (Smith, 2001) with their child's school. Research has found parental involvement higher at schools that create an inviting climate—housing a welcoming school staff (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

School Welcomeness Scale

Purpose. The purpose of the School Welcomeness Scale (SWS) is to measure the typical "welcomeness" level of any school as perceived and assessed by parents or

guardians of children attending the school. The instrument may be administered independently or in a group. Items on this scale have no single correct response; however, higher ratings on the scale suggest a higher level of "welcomeness". As a means of limiting error (Shultz and Whitney, 2005; p. 52), the measure is interested, then, in the perceptions of parents who have visited the inside of the school on more than one occasion and have interacted with the staff. The SWS is not targeted to one particular cultural or ethnic group, suggesting that all parents and guardians share common expectations of the school building, atmosphere, and personnel.

"Welcomeness" as measured by the SWS is defined as a school's kind reception or willingness to permit, admit, or receive a parent or guardian onto its campus or any campus-sponsored function. Contextually, "welcomeness" measures how appealing a school appears to a parent or guardian, as those persons ponder potential involvement. The construct is multidimensional in that it considers two broad, yet equally important, aspects of "welcomeness" -- the building as well as its personnel. Specifically, subjects will address the construct as it relates to physical attributes of the school building, accessibility of the building and its staff, as well as customer service and atmosphere.

Construction. The School Welcomeness Scale (SWS) was constructed as a closed-ended, Likert-type response measure to minimize the expertise required for test administration and to facilitate ease in analysis (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p. 54). The five-point Likert scale allows respondents to rate their agreeableness with each of the 44 survey items using anchors ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Since the target population varies with regard to educational attainment and background, the

SWS survey items were written to enhance readability across parent ability levels, thereby reducing error variance in responses and increasing reliability (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p. 56).

Item Development. Items for the School Welcomeness Scale were constructed utilizing information gathered from previous research and focus groups. In addition, subject matter experts (SMEs) were consulted in item development via focus groups and personal interview. The SMEs in this case were considered knowledgeable of subject matter because of their categorization into one or more of four groupings: current parents of school-aged children; previous parents of school-aged children; current school employees; or past school employees. Focus groups were composed of parents of students residing in public schools in the Oklahoma City area. Focus groups were held both on the school campus and at a local Midwest City church. Contact was made with a range of potential participants during the information-gathering phase of the instrument's construction, allowing for variation with regard to geographical locale, age, race, gender, educational background, and experience.

Content validity of a test relies on accurately defining the domain the test is intended to assess, then making some judgment as to the sufficiency with which that domain has been assessed. The items that comprise the test must be a representative sample of the domain (Shultz & Whitney, 2005). To assess content validity, the researcher employed the use of Lawshe's (1975) content validity ratio (CVR). The initial survey, composed of 44 statements (see Table 1), was presented to a panel of eight SMEs. Each SME was

asked to examine each survey item and rate whether the item was “essential”, “useful”, or “not necessary”, based on the operationalization of the “welcomeness” construct.

The CVR can range from +1 to –1 for a particular item, with higher scores indicating greater content validity; a CVR of 0 indicates that half of the SMEs rated the item as essential. Any positive value indicates that over half of the SMEs rated the item as essential. Items with low CVR values were deleted (Shultz & Whitney, 2005). Appropriate CVR values that would exceed statistical levels of chance are dependent on the number of SMEs in the sample. Therefore, a minimally statistically significant CVR value will be highly dependent on the number of SMEs used to provide ratings (larger panels are usually correlated with lower CVR values) (Shultz & Whitney, 2005). An appropriate CVR range for this study’s SME panel would approximate .77, which would be equivalent to perfect agreement amongst the raters, resulting in the retention of only 8 statements and a content validity index (CVI) of .77 (See Table 2). However, to assure that all aspects of the construct were addressed in the survey, the researcher chose retain items with a CVR value of .55 and higher, resulting in the retention of 19 of the initial 44 statements, with a final CVR ranging from .55 to .77. The resulting instrument has a CVI = .64 (See Table 3).

While the judgments of SMEs is important in assessing content validity, equally important are the judgments of test takers (Shultz & Whitney, 2005). It was important to present a survey that was considerate of the literacy needs of all participants, as well as assure that each survey participant understood the importance of the instrument’s results.

Face validity was an essential part of this process as the researcher considered the perceptions and motivation of each subject.

Method

Sample. Parents of two public, independent schools, serving students in grades Pre K - 8 were given the survey. The sample was composed of randomly selected, African American parents and guardians of students attending elementary and middle schools in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Of the participants, parents and guardians referenced children in the following grades: Pre Kindergarten (5.6%), Kindergarten (12%), First (8.3%), Second (8.3%), Third (.9%), Fourth (22.2%), Fifth (15.7%), Sixth (10.2%), Seventh (2.8%), Eighth (6.5%), and Other (1.9%). 5.6% of the parents/guardians did not list a grade reference.

When asked about the student-adult relationship, 84% of respondents categorized themselves as the child's parent; 8.3% listed themselves as the grandparent; .9% listed himself or herself as the sister or brother; .9% identified himself or herself as the child's uncle, aunt, or cousin; and, 5.6% chose not to respond. Overwhelmingly, 71.3% of the participants were female while 13.9% were male; 14.8% of the sample did not respond to this question.

With regard to educational background, .9% had no high school diploma; 8.3% said they graduated from high school; .9% stated that they had received some sort of trade certificate; 38.9% noted that they had some college background; 10.2% held an associate's degree; 23.1% obtained a bachelor's degree; 4.6% attained a master's degree;

and, 4.6% held a doctoral/professional degree. 8.3% of the population did not respond the question.

To approximate socioeconomic status, participants were asked to identify a career category that most represented their current employment status. Participants identified the following career groups: Construction (3.7%), Education & Training (16.7%), Postal Service (.9%), Health Services (14.8%), Human Services (2.8%), Computer Technology (1.9%), Entertainment (.9%), Administrative (13.9%), Transportation (1.9%), Farming (.9%), Sales (4.6%), and Other (30.6%). 6.5% of the group did not respond to this question. This failure to answer could have been due an "unemployed" status, which was not included as an option on the survey.

Finally, participants were asked if they felt welcome in their respective schools. 92.0% percent of the parents/guardians answered "yes" while .9% answered "no". 6.5% did not respond. As a follow-up to this question, parents were asked to identify how often they visited the "inside" of the reference child's school building. Participants gave the following responses: "Daily" (18.5%), "3-5 times a week" (5.6%), "1-2 times a week" (13%), "Monthly" (27.8%), "Less than once a month" (8.3%), and "On special occasions" (21.3%). 5.6% of the population did not respond to this question.

Procedure. Parents and guardians were distributed the surveys upon entering the school building as part of the scheduled Parent Teacher Conference Day exercises. Parents/Guardians were able to visit with school staff on a first-come-first-serve basis. Participants were asked to complete their surveys either before or after visiting with their child/children's teachers and to submit it to one of two on-campus school offices as they

exited the building. The researcher distributed 500 surveys; 102 were completed and returned, accounting for approximately 20% of the attending parent population.

Results

Analytic Procedures. An initial exploratory factor analysis using principal axis with a Promax rotation was used to examine the factor structure of the instrument, and to select item subscales. A reliability analysis was, then, conducted across the entire SWS, as well as for each of the two dimensions. Finally, plans for both construct and criterion-related validation were established.

Exploratory Factor Analysis. The exploratory factor analysis revealed two factors, both meeting the Kaiser (1960) eigenvalue criterion for factor retention (those eigenvalues with values greater than 1.0). The first factor accounted for 61% of the variance. The second, much smaller factor, accounted for 5% of the variance. Application of the Kaiser rule tends to be more accurate in situations where the number of variables (items) is small (10 –15) or moderate (20 –30) and the communalities are high (>.70) (Stevens, 2002; pp. 389). In the current study, item communalities range from .545 - .869, with 14 of the 19 items boasting a communality greater than .70. As initially hypothesized, two interpretable factors emerged from the analysis and were labeled “Inclusion” and “Reception” (See Figure 1).

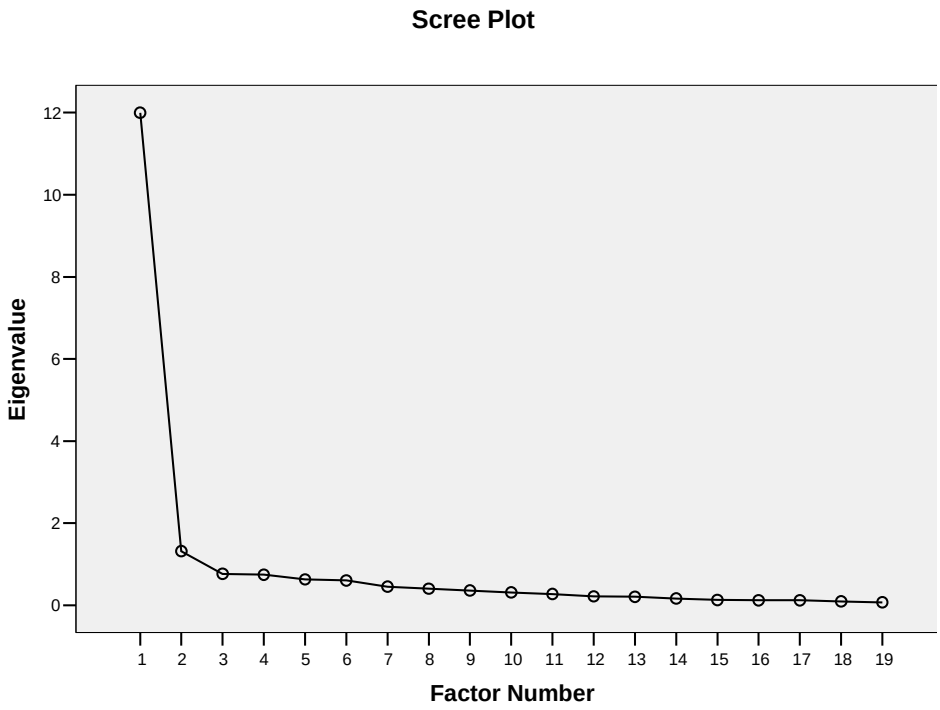

Figure 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis, Two-Factor Result

As referenced in Table 4, the following items loaded on the "Inclusion" factor: "I know the name(s) of my child's teachers"; "I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like"; "The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress"; "Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed"; "I am informed of important meeting and upcoming special school events"; "The building is clean and well organized"; "The school provides a safe environment for everyone"; "The staff and students interact respectfully"; "The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child".

The following items loaded on the "Reception" factor: "When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned"; "School staff members are easily

accessible"; "When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence"; "School administration treats all students fairly"; "Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend"; "The teachers treat all the students equally"; "I am able to get information or assistance when I need it".

Also noted in Table 4 is the fact that 3 of the 19 statements loaded low on both factors, with values ranging from .22 to .54: "It is clear what the school's goals are for my child's education"; "I know the names of my child's administrators"; and, "Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely." While these items loaded higher on Factor 1 than on Factor 2 (.4 to .5 range), loadings differed only mildly, and were eventually eliminated from the scale altogether. This was an unexpected result with one of the statements ("Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely") since it received perfect agreement ratings from SMEs during the item development stage of the study. Removal of these items resulted in a 16-item survey (See Table 5), leaving the "Inclusion" factor with a nine-item composition, and the "Reception" factor with a total of seven items.

Reliability Analysis. Coefficient alpha was calculated as a measure of internal consistency. To determine whether or not the items across the instrument were measuring the same underlying construct, a split-half (alpha) reliability coefficient was computed. With split-half reliability estimates, only one version of the test is required. To estimate reliability, then, one half of the test is correlated with the second half. However, there is always the chance of spuriously low reliability estimates due to fatigue effects therefore the results from such a procedure can sometimes be misleading (Shultz

& Whitney, 2005; p. 73). In this case, the instrument was halved based on factor structure. The "Inclusion" dimension produced an initial alpha = .954, while the "Reception" dimension generated an initial alpha = .922. Overall, the scale had an initial alpha = .961.

Considering the test halves, the researcher reviewed the Item Total Statistics (See Tables 6a, 6b, and 6c) and determined whether or not the removal of test items might increase the alpha levels for each respective dimension. Removing any of the items on the "Inclusion" dimension of the scale would not increase the alpha level. However, the author did note that while removing one of the survey items ("The building is clean and well organized") did not increase alpha, it did not lower it either. The alpha level remained at .954. In the end, the item was retained because it could potentially provide helpful information for interested schools.

The Item-Total Statistics were also reviewed for the "Reception" dimension of the survey, and there was a similar finding. The alpha level would not increase by deleting any of the items; it would, instead, lower. For the entire scale, the overall alpha = .961. Consultation of the Item-Total Statistics in this analysis revealed that removal of any of the items would not increase the reliability rating. However, the author did note here that three items could be removed without affecting alpha: "When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence"; "When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned"; and, "Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend." Still, the items were retained because they may be able to provide much-needed information for the school.

Shultz and Whitney (2005; p. 73) also note that whenever a split-half reliability estimate is calculated, one should also use the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula to correct for the fact that the test has been cut in half. The general form of the Spearman-Brown formula can be used to determine the estimated reliability of a revised version of the test if the number of items on the test is increased (or even decreased) by a specified factor. After implementing the formula, the corrected reliabilities for the survey are as follows: "Reception" (alpha = .959), "Inclusion" (alpha = .976), and the entire School Welcomeness Scale (alpha = .980).

The coefficient alpha estimate ranges on a continuum from zero to one—zero indicating no reliability and a value of one indicating perfect reliability. The common standard of a reliability estimate of .70 holds for alpha (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p. 74). Here, the School Welcomeness Scale boasts a much higher coefficient, well over .90 for each dimension and the instrument overall.

Criterion-Related Validation. To assure that the inferences and conclusions based on the resulting scores from the SWS are feasible, criterion-related validation should be employed. Examining the empirical relationship between scores on the test and a criterion of interest is usually done with the use of a correlation coefficient (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p.101). It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of this instrument is to assess the welcomeness of a school from a parent or guardian's perspective. To assess the criterion-related validity of the scale, a concurrent validity design might be most appropriate. Because concurrent validity studies collect test and criterion scores at about the same time and there is no lag time between collection of test scores and

collection of criterion scores, the validity of the test can be determined much more quickly than is the case for most predictive designs. Since the sample is typically predetermined (e.g., limited to those individuals from whom criterion data can immediately be collected), the sample on which the validation study is conducted is rarely randomly selected (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p. 102). This is, perhaps, the best arrangement for the SWS scale because all parents will not visit their child's school; however, for those who do, they would most likely be targeted to complete such an instrument. Without the experience of visiting the inside of the school and interacting with the staff, a parent would not be able to offer any helpful information or provide ratings. This interaction requirement significantly reduces the potential sample pool and, may, confine researchers to a smaller, core group of parents within the community who can accurately assess the school.

Administering the scale to parents who visit the school and interact with the staff may derive an estimate of the concurrent criterion-related validity for this test. Simultaneously, data revealing attendance at parent teacher conference days or visits to their child's classroom/school might also be collected for these individuals. A correlation between ratings on the measure of welcomeness and the corresponding data provides the estimate of concurrent criterion-related validity. Higher ratings on the scale would be associated with higher scores on a criterion.

Also of importance, here, is the concern with restriction of range, especially since concurrent criterion-related validity is being considered. Often, variability in test scores within the sample may be considerably smaller than that of the actual population. It is

typically the case that when the variability of test scores is reduced, the magnitude of the observed correlation is also reduced, encouraging the researcher to conclude that the test is less valid than it actually is (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; pp. 106-107). Therefore, it is critical that the Pearson formula be employed to statistically correct for the effects of restriction of range in the survey, assuming variability scores in the population can be estimated.

Construct Validation. Theoretically speaking, when the relationship between welcomeness and trust is considered, it is most likely that the expected pattern between the two constructs would support the following scheme: the more trust a parent or guardian has in a school, the more welcoming he/she will perceive the school to be. Various studies can be conducted to produce evidence regarding the construct validity of test scores. And, since construct validation does not offer a single premise regarding the construct and test scores but rather refers to the process of examining the entire "nomological network," there is no single validity coefficient that will "prove" construct validity. Rather, construct validation represents an ongoing examination of the propositions set forth in the nomological network (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p. 120).

In this instance, the researcher will propose a study of the internal structure of the survey. If the instrument's items are measuring the construct (welcomeness), then the items on the test should be generally interrelated. Consequently, analysis of the internal consistency of items, such as coefficient alpha, can provide evidence of construct validation (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p. 120). In addition, it may prove beneficial to

examine parent/guardian group differences on the construct, since the instrument was initially administered to an all African-American sample.

Another consideration might include an examination of the correlation of scores from the SWS with scores from a test that proposes to evaluate school trust, through the use of an MMTM matrix assessed via a confirmatory factor analysis. Since the concepts of trust and welcomeness appear be intertwined, it might be expected to find similar correlations between the test results. Such a correlation may offer some validation of the construct via convergent validity or discriminant validity (Shultz & Whitney, 2005; p.122).

Discussion

The purpose of this exercise was twofold: (a) to define and measure a new construct, school welcomeness, and (b) to develop a validation plan for the School Welcomeness Scale (SWS) that may be used to assess identifiable aspects of the construct. The SWS was designed to provide diagnostic information about a school's level of welcomeness from the perspective of an attending child's parent or guardian. The exploratory factor analysis produced a two-factor model hypothesized to underlie the responses to these items. Reliability measures were high (< .90) on both the entire instrument and its subscales, which provide some initial evidence to support the validity of the SWS.

As previously noted, schools have embraced the proposition that parental involvement is a key ingredient to increasing student achievement. A measure of school welcomeness, then, may offer institutions the information necessary to make important decisions about current involvement practices and programming. The School Welcomeness Scale may be utilized to individually estimate or determine the

welcomeness of a school, or to work in combination with other data collection methods in a comprehensive assessment of school climate. Future uses may include an estimation of parental involvement potential based on this welcomeness factor, as well as a measure of increasing parent-school trust. Implications for theory and/or practice would stress a consideration of school welcomeness – particularly parental inclusion and reception—as practitioners continue explore encouragers of and barriers to parental involvement.

This study had several limitations. Foremost, only two schools participated in the study, as a result the degree to which the findings generalize to other schools is unknown. Next, it must be noted that the instrument was sampled on a predominantly homogenous group (African American), with regard to race and ethnicity. Studies of this mature should be conducted in different contexts with different populations for generalization purposes. Future research, then, should also strive to gather more data from other racial groups such as Caucasians, Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos(as) to establish a more varied data source. In addition, only 20% of the population responded to the survey, leaving eighty percent of the population unaccounted for. The sample may, then, be considered restricted in its range. Reasons parents or guardians may not have responded to the survey could have been due to a number of issues, including literacy, schedule/availability, and the instrument's distribution process. And, finally, another limitation of the study is that several of the participants failed to respond to all of the demographic category points (e.g., educational level). The degree to which this non-reporting of information affected the results of this study is undetermined. Consequently, future research of the two-factor structure is required, as the concept could

potentially behave temporally since it is dependent on parental experience and perception, which has the potential to change over time. Further investigation, then, of the construct—its expected patterns and relationships with other measured variables—may be beneficial when determining convergent and divergent validity. To date, the researcher has been unable to identify a parallel concept to welcomeness.

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Table 1: SME Ratings

	Statement	Essential	Useful	Not Necessary	CVR
1.	I am able to find visitor's parking easily.	6	2	0	.33
2.	I see welcoming signs and language when I enter the building.	3	3	2	-.33
3.	The building's decorations and furnishings are bright and cheerful.	4	3	1	-.11
4.	The building is clean and well organized.	8	0	0	.77
5.	There is a lot of school spirit in this school.	6	2	0	.33
6.	The school displays signs that easily direct me throughout the building.	6	2	0	.33
7.	It is clear what the school's goals are for my child's education.	7	1	0	.55
8.	The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	8	0	0	.77
9.	Students' work is neatly displayed throughout the building.	6	1	1	.33
10.	The school's staff is friendly.	6	2	0	.33
11.	When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	7	1	0	.55
12.	When I telephone the school, I am not treated as if I am a bother.	6	2	0	.33
13.	The school staff members know my name.	4	4	0	-.11
14.	The school staff members know my child's name.	5	3	0	.11
15.	Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	8	0	0	.77
16.	I am able to leave messages for the school staff.	6	2	0	.33
17.	When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned.	7	1	0	.55
18.	Involvement opportunities are available to me at this school.	5	3	0	.11
19.	I am made aware of opportunities for involvement at this school.	5	3	0	.11
20.	Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	7	1	0	.55
21.	Information about upcoming events in the school is advertised in plain view.	2	5	0	.33
22.	I am informed of important meetings and upcoming special school events.	7	0	1	.55
23.	I feel special when I visit the school.	1	4	3	-.77
24.	School staff members are easily accessible.	7	1	0	.55

Table 1: SME Ratings (continued)

Statement	Essential	Useful	Not Necessary	CVR
25. The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	7	1	0	.55
26. I know the names of my child's teacher(s).	8	0	0	.77
27. The school staff is flexible and accommodating.	6	2	0	.33
28. The school staff meets my scheduling needs when arranging conferences.	6	1	1	.33
29. I know the name(s) of my child's administrator(s).	7	1	0	.55
30. I feel comfortable offering suggestions to school staff members.	6	1	1	.33
31. I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	7	1	0	.55
32. School administration treats all students fairly.	8	0	0	.77
33. I feel comfortable contacting the principal.	6	2	0	.33
34. The teachers treat all students equally.	7	1	0	.55
35. I receive good customer service from the office staff.	6	2	0	.33
36. The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	8	0	0	.77
37. Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely.	8	0	0	.77
38. I have been given a copy of the school's rules or policies.	5	3	0	.11
39. I am invited to meetings to discuss things other than my child's grades/behavior.	4	3	1	-.11
40. The teachers are interested in supporting my child.	6	2	0	.33
41. I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	7	1	0	.55
42. I feel welcomed in this school.	6	2	0	.33
43. The staff and students interact respectfully.	8	0	0	.77
44. I am able to openly talk to my child's teacher when I need to.	6	2	0	.33

Table 2: Statements with CVR = .77

	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	CVR
1.	The building is clean and well organized.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
2.	The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
3.	Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
4.	I know the names of my child's teacher(s).	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
5.	School administration treats all students fairly.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
6.	The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
7.	Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
8.	The staff and students interact respectfully.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77

Table 3: Final Instrument Statements

	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	CVR
1.	The building is clean and well organized.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
2.	It is clear what the school's goals are for my child's education.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
3.	The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
4.	When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
5.	Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
6.	When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
7.	Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
8.	I am informed of important meetings and upcoming special school events.	8	2.7500	.70711	.55
9.	School staff members are easily accessible.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
10.	The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
11.	I know the names of my child's teacher(s).	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
12.	I know the name(s) of my child's administrator(s).	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
13.	I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
14.	School administration treats all students fairly.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
15.	The teachers treat all students equally.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
16.	The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
17.	Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77
18.	I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	8	2.8750	.35355	.55
19.	The staff and students interact respectfully.	8	3.0000	.00000	.77

Table 4: Pattern Matrix

Statements	Factor	
	1	2
I know the name(s) of my child's teachers.	1.020	-.276
I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	.898	-.007
The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	.886	-.002
Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	.781	.138
I am informed of important meetings and upcoming special school events.	.779	.038
The building is clean and well organized.	.778	-.055
The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	.714	.169
The staff and students interact respectfully.	.685	.205
The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	.659	.263
It is clear what the school's goals are for my child's education.	.541	.300
I know the names of my child's administrators.	.465	.227
Staff members interact with each other appropriately and politely.	.434	.369
When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned.	-.261	.939
School staff members are easily accessible.	.099	.813
When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	-.064	.780
School administration treats all students fairly.	.219	.689
Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	.068	.614
The teachers treat all the students equally.	.225	.611
I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	.343	.589

Table 5: Resulting Factor Structure Without Ambivalent Loadings

Statements	Factor	
	1	2
I know the name(s) of my child's teachers.	1.020	-.276
I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	.898	-.007
The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	.886	-.002
Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	.781	.138
I am informed of important meetings and upcoming special school events.	.779	.038
The building is clean and well organized.	.778	-.055
The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	.714	.169
The staff and students interact respectfully.	.685	.205
The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	.659	.263
When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned.	-.261	.939
School staff members are easily accessible.	.099	.813
When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	-.064	.780
School administration treats all students fairly.	.219	.689
Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	.068	.614
The teachers treat all the students equally.	.225	.611
I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	.343	.589

Table 6a: Item-Total Statistics (Inclusion)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The building is clean and well organized.	33.4545	39.271	.714	.634	.954
The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	33.4444	37.923	.842	.775	.947
Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	33.5556	37.943	.863	.796	.946
I am informed of important meetings and upcoming special school events.	33.6364	37.315	.799	.729	.950
The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	33.4242	38.430	.859	.810	.946
I know the name(s) of my child's teachers.	33.2020	39.632	.778	.714	.950
The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	33.5354	38.517	.820	.692	.948
I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	33.3333	38.551	.859	.838	.946
The staff and students interact respectfully.	33.5859	38.388	.809	.701	.949

Table 6b: Item-Total Statistics (Reception)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	22.6735	29.150	.689	.515	.918
When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned.	22.7551	30.661	.644	.496	.921
Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	22.8878	29.193	.674	.470	.920
School staff members are easily accessible.	22.7449	27.553	.863	.771	.900
I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	22.6429	28.768	.842	.761	.903
School administration treats all students fairly.	22.8980	28.484	.842	.818	.902
The teachers treat all the students equally.	22.9490	28.853	.768	.724	.910

Table 6c: Item-Total Statistics (Total Scale)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The building is clean and well organized.	60.0737	139.388	.662	.676	.960
The teachers, administrators, and I work together as a team to help my child.	60.0632	135.273	.858	.827	.956
When I visit the school, the office staff acknowledges my presence.	60.3053	137.023	.636	.552	.961
Concerns about my child are appropriately addressed.	60.1579	135.581	.856	.837	.957
When I leave a message for a teacher/staff member, my call is returned.	60.4211	139.289	.598	.578	.961
Activities are scheduled at this school when I can attend.	60.5368	136.932	.631	.522	.961
I am informed of important meetings and upcoming special school events.	60.2526	135.340	.760	.757	.958
School staff members are easily accessible.	60.3895	132.730	.835	.805	.957
The teachers keep me informed about my child's progress.	60.0421	137.147	.828	.828	.957
I know the name(s) of my child's teachers.	59.8211	140.361	.698	.730	.959

Table 6c: Item-Total Statistics (Total Scale) - Continued

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I am able to get information or assistance when I need it.	60.2737	134.265	.866	.813	.956
School administration treats all students fairly.	60.5368	134.400	.823	.818	.957
The teachers treat all the students equally.	60.6000	135.243	.758	.762	.958
The school provides a safe environment for everyone.	60.1474	136.659	.821	.737	.957
I am able to visit my child's classroom whenever I like.	59.9474	137.242	.833	.863	.957
The staff and students interact respectfully.	60.2211	136.429	.821	.760	.957

VITA

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Title of Study: AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES AND TRUST

Pages in Study: 136 Candidate for the Degree of: Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Scope and Method of Study:

The purpose of the study was to investigate African American parents educational involvement practices of 7th and 8th grade students' in both a large public school district and a small independent public school in a Midwestern metropolitan area. Specifically, the study's objectives were to understand (1) how African American parents and guardians are involved in their child's schooling, (2) if parents felt a sense of welcomeness in the school, and (3) if parents trusted their children's school. Attention was also given to relationships between parent involvement practices; their perceptions of school welcomeness; as well as their school trust ratings. Three hundred and eighty two participants completed a survey packet which included a demographic survey and three instruments – the Parent Involvement on All Types of Activities, the School Welcomeness Scale, and the Parent Trust of School Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, factor analysis, ANOVA, and regression in terms of student grade level, parent/guardian educational background, and parent/guardian visitation practices.

Findings and Conclusions:

Consistent with research, African American parents/guardians with lower economic and academic resources were less involved in their child's school, reported feeling less welcome in their child's school, and trusted their schools less then their more educated and higher socio-economic status counterparts. Per the outcomes of this research, it is also apparent that there is a positive relationship between parent involvement, school welcomeness, and trust. Exactly if or how school trust and school welcomeness work together to influence more visible, on-campus involvement activity remains unclear.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Katye Perry